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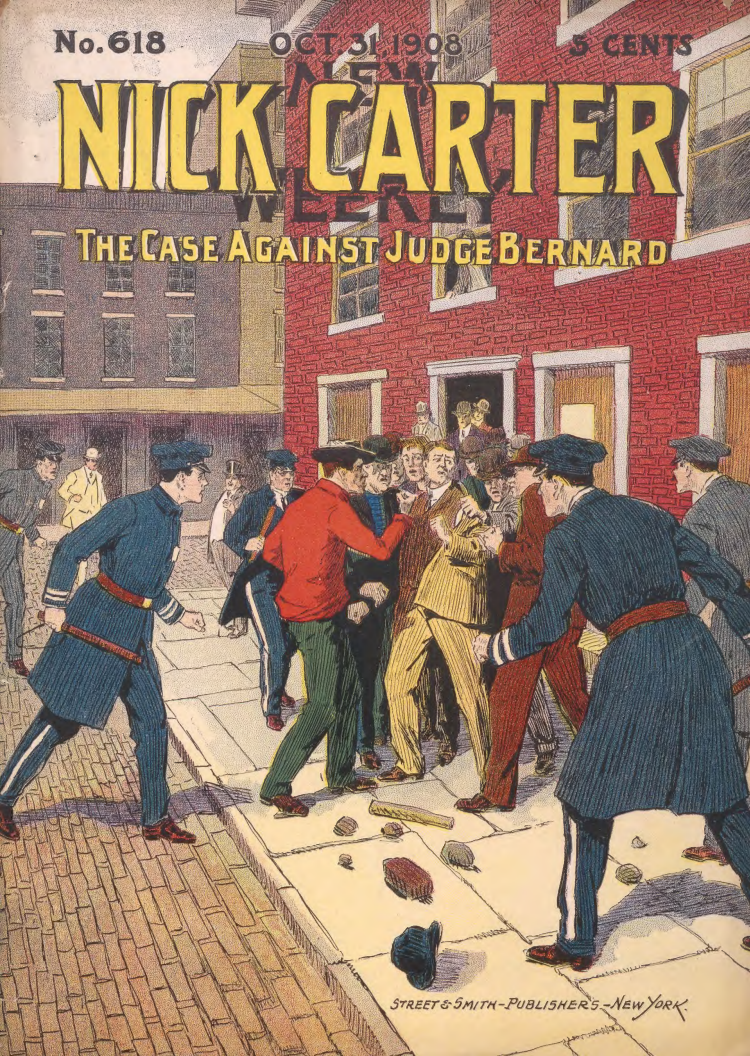
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE CASE AGAINST JUDGE BERNARD



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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The Case Against Judge Bernard

OR,

HOW NICK CARTER SOLVED A JUDICIAL PROBLEM.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE BOX.

Patsy hung up the telephone-receiver and yawned mightily. It was an hour or two before dawn—at least, before dawn in New York City.

Joseph had come to his bedside shortly before—Patsy seldom left the house at present, while Nick Carter and Chick were both away, and Patsy's wife Adelina was visiting her parents away down in Chile—and had routed him out, after some trouble. Patsy slept as he did most other things—with all his heart!

"The master is calling for you, Mr. Patsy," said Joseph," in his grave way.

"Holy mackerel!" ejaculated Patsy. "He hasn't got home?"

He leaped out of bed and made a grab for his nether garments, while the valet backed toward the door.

"Oh, no, indeed, sir!" said Joseph. "He's on the phone."

"Aw, shucks!" growled Patsy, still fumbling with his buttons. "He'll never see whether I'm dressed or not! I'll be there in a jiffy, Josie, old boy!"

So he had scuttled out to the phone in Nick's dressing-room, which was the one usually used at night in the house. Joseph lay near this, and could hear the call easier than in the office, at the back of the house.

And for some minutes Patsy conversed with his chief, who was far away, in Baltimore, upon a topic that was, just then, occupying most of their waking thoughts. It was a big case which had called Nick away from home—to Washington, Baltimore, and other places—and after some thrilling experiences and more hard work, the great detective had obtained the evidence he had sought, and was about to complete the weaving of the web around the rascals whom he was after.*

The whole matter hinged upon the contents of a little wooden box that Nick had shipped by express from Baltimore the very day before, and which had been brought to the house in the evening by a special messenger from the express office.

The box was addressed in Nick's handwriting to himself, but the chief had been kept from telegraphing, or otherwise informing Patsy, of its special importance.

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, Nos. 616 and 617.

As the box was addressed to Nick and to nobody else in the house Patsy had placed it on Nick's desk in the office, and had not ventured to open it at all.

Now, when, he had taken, at Nick's dictation, some important instructions for the day's work, Patsy proposed to go at once to the office, remove the box to the basement, and lock it into the burglar-proof vault there.

"Ow-wow!" yawned Patsy, stretching his arms again and gaping. "This sporting life is killing me. Gee! what time is it?" as the silver-toned bell on the stairway began to strike the hour of five. "Well!" as he finished the count, "my beauty sleep is spoiled, so it is! I might as well dress as go back to bed."

But he did not dress first. He crossed the hall and entered the room next to the long office wherein Nick did most of his work and received his visitors, when he was at home.

There was a peculiarity about that office. When one entered it from this next room, one stood in a passage four feet wide, behind a screen of opaque silk that was stamped in the same pattern as the wall-paper in the office and looked exactly like the solid walls of the big room, in fact.

This screen fitted the walls, floor, and ceiling of the office, and to one who did not know the secret, unless he placed his hand upon this end wall, the deceit would never be suspected.

The screen masked the door through which Patsy passed, and made it possible for one of Nick's assistant's—or anybody else whom he desired so to do—to sit down in this narrow passage and listen to all that went on in the office.

There was a secret spring that drew aside a portion of the screen-wall, when the detective and his confidents wished to pass from one room to the other; but before Patsy, in his bed-slippers, had reached the screen and stretched forth his hand to touch the spring, his sharp ear was suddenly cognizant of a faint noise on the other side of the silk curtain.

Patsy stopped and listened. The click of a door-latch had been as plain in his ears as anything he had ever heard!

Joseph had gone into his room, he thought. Besides themselves, there was nobody in the house but the usual servants.

Who would be roaming about the place at this hour? Certainly nobody would have any business in the office at this time of the night saving himself or Joseph.

Patsy, suspicious instantly, waited to hear more.

Then he tiptoed to a particular part of the screen-wall.

There were few pieces of furniture against this wall. Indeed, the office was a sparsely furnished room at best.

But hung upon the screen was a very well-executed picture of a beautiful Greek slave girl. She stood upon the auction-block, her tapering wrists knotted together before her, her loosened hair half-shrouding her wonderfully modeled shoulders and bust, a loosely girdled garment draping her nether limbs.

The whole effect of the picture was that of maidenly beauty and modesty. The long lashes were lowered so that her eyes were half-closed; yet a glint of those same eyes showed, as though the inate curiosity—inbred in every daughter of Eve—forced her to look out at the man who was to be her master.

The picture hung flat against the wall. It was, indeed, screwed to the framework of the screen.

And, piercing those wonderful eyes of the Greek maiden, were two small holes. A flap on the back of the picture—which was really a part of the wall—kept the light from shining through from behind the picture.

Patsy raised this flap and fitted his own orbs to the apertures in the face of the painting. These holes were for this very purpose. Whoever stood behind the screen could view all that went on in the office, as well as overhear.

The hall door *was* open. A gas-jet always burned all night in that hall, and so near to the office door that it illuminated the room somewhat when the portal was open.

This light now enabled Patsy, behind the screen, to see all that went forward in the upper part of the room. The big table at which Nick so often sat and worked was bathed in the mellow yellow light from the hall.

And standing in the broad semiglow was a figure—the figure of a man. Patsy was strangely moved at this discovery. For an instant he believed that his eyes must be deceiving him—that perhaps this was an optical delusion.

But, then, the figure moved—it turned about—and Patsy recognized Joseph!

He chuckled, then. The valet had been standing there listening intently, as though he had heard some sound in the passage outside the office—or thought he had.

"The old guy heard *me*, and I heard *him*. We

were both of us scared," thought Patsy, and he made no movement to betray his presence at the peep-hole.

Evidently satisfied that his imagination had played him a trick, Joseph, in the half-light of the office, moved at once to the table. Patsy's eyes began to bulge and he watched him with growing interest.

The valet always kept Nick's desk as neat as an old maid's bureau. When Nick left matters in confusion, and Joseph had a chance to do so, every scrap was put straight before the detective's return.

Nick often said that Joseph was the only man he had ever known who could put another person's belongings to rights without losing or mislaying half of them!

So the top of the big desk-table was perfectly arranged, saving for the express parcel that Patsy had placed there himself the evening before when it had arrived.

Joseph at once took up the box, weighed it in his hand as though judging its contents, and then turned back to the hall, went out, and closed the door, taking the box with him.

"Well, wouldn't that pry you loose from all holts?" whispered Patsy, taking a long breath. "To get up in the middle of the night—or pretty nigh that—and fiddle around clearing up Nick's table! I declare, I believe Joseph's going dippy. He's too neat to live. Hey! what's he going to do with that box?"

He stepped back into the other room and looked into the hall. Joseph was sedately going down-stairs, with the box in his hand.

"I'm a greenhorn if he ain't going to put it in the safe himself! Now, ain't that just like him?" growled Patsy, with some disgust. "Perhaps he heard me chinning the chief over the phone, and got onto the fact that the box is valuable. And then, because I didn't run at once and get the box, *he's* taken it himself to be sure it's safe. Confound his interfering old hide!"

For Joseph, as well as Chick, Patsy, and Adelina, had the combination to the vault in the basement.

Patsy was tempted at first to run after the valet and give him "a bit of his mind." He refrained from doing this, however, for at the bottom everybody liked Joseph, despite his fussy, bothersome ways.

"Aw, let him get along with it himself!" muttered the young man. "Why should I pick a bone with him? As long as the box is safe, what's the odds who puts it away?"

And he let it go at that, and went into the bathroom and stood under the shower for "an eye-opener."

Perhaps the cold water not only opened his eyes, but it was a tonic to Patsy's mind, as well. When he was dressing he began to bother himself regarding Joseph and the little box.

"Hang the fellow! What did he want to do that for? I'll just find him and put it to him straight. Nick didn't tell *him* to look out for the thing. It was my business, and he interfered."

In this spirit he went to the valet's room as soon as he got into his clothes, and knocked.

"Yes, sir!" ejaculated Joseph, who never seemed to really sleep himself—or to go to bed, as for that matter!

He appeared now at his door, fully dressed, and just as though—as Patsy thought—he had "just stepped out of a bandbox."

"What is it, sir?" queried the valet, his face as wooden as usual.

"Confound you, Joseph! Haven't you been to bed at all?"

"Oh, yes, sir. But I am just getting up."

"Huh! you didn't have long in bed this last time, then."

"Sir?" queried the man, showing in his voice, at least, that he was puzzled.

"Have you been to bed, I mean, since calling me?"

"Of course, sir. That was at five. It is now past six o'clock."

"Then you weren't down-stairs long?"

"Since Mr. Carter called you, do you mean?"

"That's what I mean."

"I haven't been down at all, sir."

"What's that you say?" cried Patsy, in sudden alarm.

"I haven't been off this floor, sir. I came right back to bed after calling you."

"Why, you blooming—— Say!" roared Patsy, catching him by the shoulder. "You're not addicted to sleep-walking, are you? I never heard tell that you were a somnambulist."

"I am not, sir."

"Never walk in your sleep?"

"Never, sir."

"But, Joseph, I *saw* you in the office—not three-quarters of an hour ago."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Patsy! I was abed here and asleep three-quarters of an hour ago."

"Holy mackerel! I've either gone dippy myself, or *you* are crazy!" yelled Patsy, and he turned short around and ran at top speed to Nick Carter's office.

CHAPTER II.

JOSEPH'S DOUBLE.

Patsy wasn't particularly superstitious, and he did not believe in ghosts, hobgoblins, or banshees—at least, he believed in them no more than he could help. But he was Irish, and for the first moment or two he honestly believed that he must have seen a vision.

A vision, however, was something intangible. A visionary person who *looked* like Joseph might be able to open doors, and close them, and appear to walk and act like a normal human being.

But Patsy was mighty sure that no intangible ghost *could have carried away that wooden box!*

"If that was a ghost, or a banshee, holy mackerel! but the box did not go with him. It only appeared to be taken!" muttered Patsy, and flung open the door of the office.

It was daylight now, but the sun's rays struggled in but feebly at the windows, which were heavily curtained. Patsy dashed forward and flung the draperies aside and snapped up the shade.

The light poured into the room. It betrayed everything upon the desk. The wooden box was not there!

Joseph appeared at that moment at the door. Even his face expressed surprise and anxiety now.

"Joseph!" shouted Patsy. "Where's that box?"

"What box, sir?"

"The one I placed on that table last night."

"The box for Mr. Carter?"

"That's it. And sent here by Nick himself from Baltimore."

"I saw it, sir."

"Aye! But do you see it now?" cried the young man.

"I certainly do not, Mr. Patsy."

"Well," sighed Patsy, "there's some comfort in that."

"What, sir?"

"I didn't know but I'd gone dotty quite."

"You do act strangely, Patsy," declared Joseph, eying him closely.

"I feel strange. Something has happened. If what you tell me is true——"

"About what?" asked Joseph.

"That you have not been down-stairs this morning."

"I have not, sir."

"You went to your room immediately after calling me?"

"I did, sir."

"Holy mackerel, Joseph! this is no joke you're springing on me?"

But that was a foolish question, Joseph never joked!

"I don't understand you, sir," said the valet stiffly.

"I'll make you understand me!" declared Patsy. "See here!"

He told him, word for word, what had occurred—how he had thought the valet went to the office, removed the important express package, and went down-stairs with it.

"It was not me, Mr. Patsy," declared Joseph firmly.

"Who was it, then? I ask you that!" cried the amazed and bewildered Patsy.

Joseph shook his head, staring at him.

"Have you a double?"

"There is foul play here, Mr. Patsy," said the valet huskily. "You *know* there cannot be anybody look just like me. And how would he get into the house?"

"But you didn't take the box?"

"No, sir!"

"And it's gone! I swear it's gone! Joseph!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Could I be mazed, do you think? Did I dream it? Did I put it in the vault myself?"

"Let us go and see, sir," cried the valet, catching at this chance with alacrity.

Patsy dashed down-stairs ahead of him. Not that he had any hope of finding the box in the vault. It would be an incredible chance. But to tell the truth Patsy's usual bright wit was clouded.

The shock of the thing—his perfect assurance that he had seen Joseph take that box out of the office and carry it down-stairs—supposedly to the vault for safekeeping—so enthralled his mind that he could think of nothing else intelligibly until he had assured himself that the thing was utterly preposterous.

They opened the safe. The box was nowhere to be found in it. And Patsy made certain that the locks had not been tampered with of late, for even the handle of the door was dusty!

"Well, holy mackerel!" ejaculated he at last, staring at the valet. "If you didn't put it in here, what *did* you do with it? Don't have a brain-storm, Joseph. Come on up-stairs again. And we'll ask the women folk. By thunder, Joseph! *Some*body took that box off the table and carried it away, for I saw them with my own eyes!"

"We have been robbed!" declared Joseph.

"But by whom? Somebody who looks near enough

like you to be your twin? And, by thunder! he had on the very clothes you wear this morning."

"Impossible!"

"Perhaps I'm dotty, all right! But the box is gone, that's sure."

"And it was of importance?"

"Holy mackerel, Joseph! Don't I tell you so? Why, according to Nick, what is in that box puts the kibosh on Abe Grout, and holds him kicking over a hot finish! That's right! Come, Joseph, you surely know what business called the chief away?"

"Something concerning the Blaney, Lowell & Co. affair?" queried the valet.

"Right!"

"And this box—what was in it?"

"Let me tell you what took Nicks away, and what he told me just now over the wire:

"In a general way you know that the secretary of the Stock Exchange Association, Mr. Mark Cameron, engaged Nick to ferret out the tricky doings of a certain brokerage firm known as Blaney, Lowell & Co. They had pulled off several stunts during the past few months that have cost Wall Street people a whole lot of real money, and have raked in the shekels of the public in a perfectly scandalous way.

"Notably, they got hold of some advance information regarding a decision of the United States supreme court, and by playing both ends against the middle, as the classic phrase goes, they skinned the Street and nailed its hide, like a pole-cat's, against the side of the woodshed to dry.

"It was suspected that Abe Grout, gambler, policy king, and bad man generally, is backing the Blaney-Lowell concern, and his right-hand man—the real schemer, indeed—is Paul G. Shade. Enough has been discovered against the firm to close up the shop; but that would not nail to the cross the two big men in it. The work before the chief was to get evidence against Abe and Shade.

"Shade seldom comes to New York; he lives mostly in Washington with his niece, who likewise acts as his secretary, Miss Lora Price. Well, while Nick was trying to get tabs on Shade, or Grout, in comes a queer old duck from down Baltimore, one they call the Water Ferret of the Chesapeake—a diver. He gives Nick a yarn that sounds a good deal like a story out of the "Thousand and One Nights"—to say nothing of the days!

"It seems he was hard by when this Abe Grout and Paul Shade had a set-to over a letter signed by Grout—which had been in Shade's possession—and which letter seemed to be all the evidence necessary to prove the said Grout the 'man higher up' in the case of Blaney, Lowell & Co. D'ye see? This letter gave orders to Shade in such a way that it would be accepted as proof in court that Abe Grout was the man behind the brokerage concern.

"Very good! That letter was the real cheese for us, you see, Joseph. And what Ferret told him about it made Nick as pleased as Punch. Nick thought the old guy had it up his sleeve, and just wanted money for it.

"But it seems the letter had been lost. Shade and Grout got in a scrap over it, and it got torn and the part with Abe's signature fell into the water. In trying to save it for them, this Amos Ferret sunk the paper. Ve-ry good for Grout, Shade & Co.!

"But when Ferret went down in his diving-suit next time—he was building a sea-wall along there—what does he do but find the paper being held by a big oyster—both Mr. Oyster's shells clamped down on it. No wonder you look startled. We often hear of these Broadway chorus-girls getting presents of blocks of stock and diamond-set ear-muffs from lobsters; but whoever got a billy-doux from an oyster?

"That's what the chief wanted immediate, just the same," continued Patsy, his eyes twinkling. "He was after that letter. Ferret had left it so many fathoms under the surface of the Chesapeake—down Tangier Sound way—and Nick agreed to meet him there and go down for it.

"Meanwhile he took a trip to Baltimore and Washington, as you know, Joseph. What he told me this morning over the telephone leads me to believe that he has something of a lively time down there.

"It seems that there is something about this Blaney-Lowell affair that some of the high muckymucks at Washington are interested in, and they have been at Nick to get facts. He has had several experiences with Shade and his niece, and, later, in Baltimore, with Shade and Abe Grout himself, that will make interesting telling when he gets back.

"However, that's not the point. It was the submarine clue Nick was after—the letter, you know—and he got it. He landed in Baltimore yesterday morning, I understood him to say, with the letter, oyster, and all in a box.

"Believing he was being dogged by Abe Grout's men, he shipped the little box here by express. But he had no chance until just now to let us know how important it was.

"Grout knew he had the letter, and learned that

he had shipped the box containing the evidence to the house here. Do you see the point now, Joseph?" demanded Patsy, with his hand on the valet's shoulder.

"I tell you I stood behind that screen there, Joseph, and saw you come into this room, pick up the box, walk out, and later I saw you descending the stairs with it. I believed you were taking it down to the vault for safekeeping.

"Hold on! Don't get mad again. I hear you say that you didn't do this. But who *did?* The box is gone. I allowed it to be taken right from under my very nose. If it wasn't you, it was your double, Joseph! Now, old man, can you explain this—can you?"

CHAPTER III.

THE BULL ON THE BEAT.

For once Joseph was really excited out of his usual staid self. He had served Nick Carter faithfully and well for years, and the chief reposed much confidence in him.

Joseph knew the boys well, too. Patsy's impulsiveness did not much disturb him; but on this occasion the trend of that young man's speech seemed along the line of accusation.

It was ridiculous to believe that Patsy was either in fun, or that he had dreamed he saw the box removed. The fact that the box *was* gone was sufficient to bear out Patsy's statement in the valet's mind.

"I swear to you, Patsy, that I was abed and—I think—asleep, when you say you saw the box taken away," cried Joseph emphatically. "You had no business to allow the person to remove it——"

"What!" cried Patsy. "When I saw it was you?"

"It was not me, I tell you!"

"Well, I thought it was. What's the difference?"

"A good deal. If anybody made up to look something like you came into this house, I should not let him go again undisturbed."

"Holy mackerel! You don't know what you would have done under like circumstances," grunted Patsy.

"But the damage is done——"

"And that's no lie! It *is* done. And we're not helping any if we stand here and rag each other. We've got to do something—and do it quick!"

"It is too bad that Mr. Chickering is not here," said Joseph.

Now, this made Patsy mad. It looked as though Joseph did not consider him—Patsy—capable of taking the initiative.

"Gee!" he muttered. "We'll try to run along until Chick gets here. You don't think I'm going to sit down and fold my hands, do you? or twiddle my fingers? I'll take a look around and see what's doing."

Breakfast had not yet been served. Patsy had made up his mind, now that he cooled down, that this matter was no joke.

Patsy did not understand fully the trouble Nick had been having in Baltimore regarding the contents of that small wooden box. But knowing what was in it, he was sure of one thing:

Abe Grout and his henchman, Shade, desired to get hold of the oyster and the torn letter. They were the only people interested in it besides the detective himself.

They were both in Baltimore—or near that town; but they undoubtedly had affiliations with people in New York who would do their telegraphed bidding without hesitancy.

Since Nick Carter and his assistants had taken up the case of Blaney, Lowell & Co., Nick had realized that they were all being closely watched, and even the house shadowed, by emissaries of Abe Grout. Somebody had gained expert knowledge of the detective's domicile, of old Joseph especially, and this masquerade that had been pulled off was arranged at short notice.

Learning that Nick had expressed the precious box right to his own residence, the plotters had telegraphed their employee to enter and seize the box before use could be made of the contents. The wonder of it was that the fellow seemed to know exactly where the box was. And nothing else seemed to have been touched in the raid. It was surely not the chance robbery of an ordinary thief. Patsy was certain of that!

In the first place no ordinary burglar would have knowingly tackled Nick Carter's premises. The greatest thief-catcher that New York boasted would be rather a large contract for any crook to tackle without some special motive.

And this one—whoever he was—had inside information, came for a special purpose, and made good his escape in the quietest way a burglar ever worked.

Nick Carter did not trouble to put burglar-alarms on his doors and windows. But his house was as secure as any other first-class residence could be made.

Patsy did not expect to find any "break" whereby the thief had entered. Without doubt the cautious crook, whoever he was, had obtained keys to the prem-

ises some time before, against the possible necessity of making the detective a visit.

Patsy did make some inquiries among the servants below stairs, however. But all the doors had been found locked as usual when they got up.

The young fellow personally examined the window fastenings. They had not been tampered with. The burglar—the man who had masqueraded as Joseph, the valet—had entered by one of the doors, gone upstairs to the office, secured the box, returned to the door, and locked it behind him when he quietly departed.

"Holy mackerel! as easy as rolling off a log! And we call ourselves smart at that! This guy is a wonder and no mistake," murmured Patsy, as he prepared to leave the house without waiting for breakfast.

That he should have seen the fellow—actually had him under his eye—when the robbery was committed, galled Patsy immensely. He felt as though he should never be able to hold up his head among his associates, and certainly never look Nick in the face again, if he did not discover the thief, and recover the document his chief set such store by.

But the young Irishman knew well enough that he had no cheap crook to deal with. Any man who would have the nerve—and the ability—to pull off such a trick as had been perpetrated on Nick Carter's household would be a foxy and dangerous lag indeed.

Patsy's knowledge of the "Under World" was extensive. He knew many crooks by sight, and many more by description and character.

The manner in which a job is done often aids the shrewd detective in deciding who the criminal must be. A job, in other words, bears certain "ear-marks" that are usually quite unmistakable.

But in this case Patsy was up against a blank wall. He hadn't a thing to build his case on. He could not think of a crook who would be bold enough, and actor enough, to have carried through this extraordinary burglary!

Think of it! The man must, in the first place, have been very familiar with Nick's household. Of course, Joseph had marked peculiarities of character, appearance—even of gait—that would not fail to impress a close observer. But the crook who acted the part of the valet's double, must have had several opportunities of studying Joseph before getting his imitation so nearly perfect.

Patsy had been wide enough awake at the time to judge clearly on this point. Never for a moment had he doubted the identity of the man whom he saw taking the box from the table and going down-stairs with it. He could not see the face clearly, but under the circumstances, it was probable that the burglar was made up very closely to represent Joseph in feature as well as form and dress.

Armed with some means of quietly entering the Carter domicile, the thief had ascended through the halls to Nick's office, trusting to his disguise, if he met anybody on the way saving Joseph himself. What he would have done had it chanced to be Joseph who saw him was a question of some interest! Patsy had no time for that now, however.

His idea was to find out what had become of the fellow—and notably the box—when he left the house. The hour was early—soon after five. The street would not have been very well filled with pedestrians. It was not, even now.

This was one of the best residential sections of Manhattan. A man could not leave one of the double, brown-stone front houses, carrying a package, at that early hour without being noticed by somebody. Not even the servants were astir at five o'clock. Milkmen, bakers, and policemen were about the only folk abroad at the time.

Patsy had not lived here for months, going in and out at all hours of the day and night, without knowing most of the "regulars" in the neighborhood. He knew which firms delivered milk on the block, what company had the ice trade, who the bakers were who went through the street early, and—of course!—he knew the policemen on the beat, no matter how frequently they might be shifted.

The "bull in harness," as the crooks call members of the uniformed force, who was on duty at five o'clock would not go back to the station until eight. He was still somewhere about the neighborhood, and believing he was the most promising person of whom to make inquiries—and the easiest got at—Patsy went on a still hunt for the cop.

Perhaps Patsy was pessimistic regarding the force. At least, he knew that a saloon corner acted usually like a magnet to a policeman. And there were but two saloons on this beat, which bordered Central Park at one end.

At the second saloon he found his man. The officer was just turning away from the side door, and passing the back of a hand caressingly across his mustache. He nodded to Patsy, recognized a brother Irishman, and winked.

"The top of the mornin' to ye!" he exclaimed. "E're stirrin' early—or are ye jest goin' home?"

"No; I'm out on tour," returned Patsy. "We turned out early at our house this a. m."

"Ah-ha!" exclaimed the cop. "So I see. What's doing?"

The officer knew that Nick Carter lived in the house, and that Patsy was his assistant—or one of them.

Patsy marked what he said, and he caught up the suggestion immediately.

"So you saw the old man going out early, did you?" he asked, carelessly enough.

"The old man? Mr. Carter? Sure not!"

"No, no! I mean old Joseph."

"Aw! th' vally? Him I *did* see. An' be the same token, he seen me and purty near took to his legs. What's that he was carryin'? Ye'd think he had been robbin' the house."

"Oh, he was carrying the box, was he?" queried Patsy, easily and bravely.

"He was not," said the bull. "He was carryin' a bag—a gunny-sack. Begorra! I t'ought it was a dead pup he had, or mebbe was goin' to drown the family cat."

"Huh! So he was making for the river, was he?" asked Patsy, cute as a weasel to grab at this idea suggested by the bull's reply.

"He was. What's the matter? Has he swiped the family silver and set out for parts unknown?" demanded the cop, immensely amused at his own joke.

"Say! either you think Nick Carter ain't got much silver, or else Joseph was carryin' a mighty big bag," said Patsy, with scorn.

"Well, that's so! There didn't seem much in the bag. But what did he run for when he saw me?"

"Aw, gee!" exclaimed Patsy, bursting into laughter. "You wouldn't scare a goat, Conroy! Joseph was going fishing, and I reckon he was hurrying to get a South Ferry train. The *Al Foster* starts from there early to-day, you know."

"More power to him! I'd like to go fishing myself," complained Conroy.

Then he suddenly straightened up and looked "eyes right."

"'Tis me Rounds—bad 'cess to him!" grumbled Conroy, between his teeth.

"By-by, ma honey, I'm a gwine!" murmured Patsy, and they separated.

But the young chap was not at all as happy as his words and manner suggested. The cop had told him little. Frankly he had only the direction the unknown masquerader had taken when he left Nick Carter's house.

CHAPTER IV.

A FINE SPUN THREAD.

But *that* was something. Nick Carter had taught his assistants one thing—if anything at all!—and that was not to scorn the small clue. A small detail, as Patsy well knew, might point the way the wind blew.

He had learned from the bull on the beat the general direction in which the Unknown had walked on leaving the Carter premises.

Of course, the masquerader might have had a carriage waiting in the vicinity; yet one little point led Patsy to believe that was improbable.

The cross-town street blocks in Manhattan are long. Seven of them make a mile.

Nick Carter's residence was near the corner of one of these cross-streets and an avenue—and at the western end of the block. If the Unknown had gone toward the river, as the policeman said, he meant the East River, that being nearest.

And he must have walked almost the entire length of the long cross-street block before he got to a corner, around which he could pass and so get out of sight of the house.

Had he had a vehicle of any kind awaiting him, it looked to Patsy as though it would have been standing around the nearer corner—on the avenue to the west of Nick's house. It would have attracted less notice on that avenue, too, than on the one to the east.

So Patsy was pretty sure that the man came to the house, and went from it, afoot. He might have taken the trolley on the avenue, or even walked to the elevated; but he very likely did not have a private equipage.

While figuring out these modest deductions, Patsy had been going back toward his home. At the corner of the street on which he lived—at the avenue to the east of Nick's house—he halted abruptly, his eyes fixed upon a bullet-headed young fellow who was arranging his stock of trade of newspapers and magazines on a small stand.

"Hello, Jerry!" ejaculated Patsy, with sudden warmth, and drawing nearer to the bullet-headed one.

The latter turned rather a scowling countenance toward Nick Carter's assistant. Then, when he saw who it was his scarred face cleared a little.

"'Mornin' to ye!" he said.

"Don't say it if it hurts ye," advised Patsy. "What's gone wrong now?"

"Did I say anything had?" returned the newspaper-vender, as snappish as a hard-shell crab.

"Nix! But some fellow once said that actions speak louder than words, and I can improve that by remarking that some people's muggs are more explanatory than their conversation. Come on! Wake up and be sociable, Jerry."

"Oh, I'm awake! And I've been awake all night."

"What's the matter? Been to-a wake?"

"A toot'ache. Just as soon as one of these painless joints open, you can bet I'm goin' to have the toot' yanked."

"I glory in your pluck, my boy!" declared Patsy, chuckling. "I warrant you weren't late for your papers *this* morning, then?"

"I was not. And I left yours, and Mr. Carter's at your stoop two hours ago. Didn't you get 'em?"

"Sure, I didn't look before coming out."

"Oh, say! of course you did. There was somebody up there took 'em in—I saw him."

"Now, did ye?" cried Patsy, greatly delighted. "Joseph, ye mean?"

"Mr. Carter's servant—yes."

"He took 'em in, did he?"

"Yes."

"Then you got there before he went out?"

"He opened the area door just as I chucked down the papers. I saw him pick 'em up."

"Then he went along, didn't he?"

"I never stopped to look. I had me bundle of papers for over on the avenue."

"Ah-ha!" ruminated Patsy. "And who was looking out for your stand while you were taking around your customer's papers?"

"Aw, ye know the dago at the saloon on the other corner—Joe? He cleans out the saloon and blacks boots outside. Sure, ye know him? He keeps his eye on the papers. Yer after information this morning, Mr. Patsy."

"Is Joe around now?" queried Patsy, without commenting on Jerry's compliment.

"I just seen him go into the cellar under the saloon," vouchsafed the newspaper-vender.

Patsy hurried across the street and whistled down the cellarway. Joe appeared, saw a possible customer, and hurried up. Patsy was wise enough to get his information while sitting under the bootblack's ministrations—if Joe proved to have any information to offer.

"Oh, yes, sir. I know-a da gent," declared Joe, when Patsy had brought the conversation around to Joseph's personal appearance. "I see-a him a lot."

"Seen him this morning?"

"You mean-a *early* dis mornin'?"

"Sure. About five o'clock."

"I see-a heem," admitted Joe, polishing away at Patsy's shoe.

"He went past here, didn't he?"

"He went dat way," declared the Italian, still pointing east.

"Went along this block, did he?"

"I see-a him when I was across da street at da paper-stand. He went t'roo dis street."

"Sure, are you?"

"*Si, si, signor!* I nevair mistak-a da gent!" declared Joe emphatically.

"All right, Joe. Give that other shoe a lick and a promise. I'm in a hurry," said Patsy.

He was eager to be on the trail of Joseph's double. According to the bootblack he had continued along the second block, going toward the river, without turning either down-town, or up.

As it chanced there was an all-night oyster and lunch-stand built against the blank side of the corner building at the next avenue. Patsy had often stopped there himself for a few "raws" on his way home to bed. The night partner of the concern was likely still to be on duty.

Hurrying from the bootblack-stand Patsy arrived at the lunchman's open window and called for a cup of coffee, and, while he sipped it, he entered into conversation with the man.

"Pretty lonesome around here in the early morning, eh?" he ventured.

"Oh, we have quite a crush at six o'clock. Car conductors and motormen from the barn over yonder."

"But before that?"

"Well, it pays us to keep going. Sometimes we ketch a bunch of stews tackin' home. They think the oysters and coffee puts 'em right," and the lunchman grinned.

"But about five o'clock, say?"

"What you fishin' for, Patsy?" demanded the other, his eyes twinkling. "I know yer. Ain't lost a friend, have yer?"

"By thunder, Mike! What do you know about it?" demanded the young fellow.

"Know about what?"

"How d'you know I'm looking for somebody?"

"I reckon that there's something like that up your sleeve."

"No! You've seen somebody this morning. Who was it?"

"Hully gee! I've seen a lot of folks."

"But somebody in particular. Somebody I might be interested in?"

"Aw, say! I suppose I gotter tell yer. Does he go off on a booze often?"

"Who?"

"That sanctimonious-lookin' cuss that lives there where you do—what's he called?"

"Joseph?"

"Yep. He's the feller."

"Did you see him?"

"I did. I thought he'd just gone in for a hooker. But I guess he's on an early mornin' souse, heh?"

"You've got the best of me, Mike!" declared Patsy. "I never knew Joseph to booze."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the lunchman. "The old chap does it all on the sly, does he?"

"It's a new one on me, I admit," said Patsy, somewhat puzzled.

"Well, now, I see lots o' these fellers hereabout sneakin' into Ryan's for a hooker, early enough. But unless I missed him—an' I ain't been away from this window, an' ain't likely to till Fred, me partner, comes on—that old Joey-boy is still in there. He must be well soused by this time."

"In Ryan's?" muttered Patsy, staring at the saloon diagonally across the avenue.

"That's where he went—as bold as brass. Sure, I thought he was rushing an early bird; but I ain't never seen him come out wit' it since."

"An early bird?" queried Patsy, his eyes opening.

"Yep. A duck. He had it in a bag—or it looked like it. But to-day ain't Sunday."

"Oh! a growler!" exclaimed Patsy.

"So I said. I thought it was a long way for him to come for a pail of beer."

"And you didn't see him come out?"

"Didn't I say so?"

"I'll go over and take a look around."

"You'd better send for a wagon to take him home in," chuckled Mike. "If he's been guzzling Ryan's stuff all this time, he'll be dead to the world."

Patsy went across and stepped into the saloon. There was not a soul about saving a fellow in a fresh white jacket reading the morning paper behind the bar.

The place had a fairly good reputation, as such places go, and as far as Patsy had ever heard. But men in the liquor business are not always choice of their associates and friends, and many a barkeeper of even semirespectable saloons, "stands in" with crooks and "strong-arm" men in general for a "rake-off" in any "turn" that may be pulled off. Patsy was not green enough to believe that the barkeeper would tell him the gospel truth if he didn't want to! Patsy had no way of forcing the fellow to be honest.

But if he did not chance to know the crook whom Patsy believed had been in here dressed as Joseph, Nick Carter's valet, he might be willing to pass over a little gratuitous information.

"What's yours?" queried the bartender, nodding, and throwing aside his paper.

Patsy called for a drink that he did not taste, and entered into conversation at once:

"Say, I'm looking for a friend of mine that's round these corners, getting on a skate, it's likely," he remarked confidentially. "His wife wants him home, and he'll only get loaded to the guards and blow his money if I don't nail him," and the young fellow proceeded to give Joseph this terrible character—and a wife—by describing him fully and particularly to the bartender.

"Have you seen him?" he concluded.

"Yesterday? Last night?" drawled the other languidly.

"No. This morning."

"Nix. Ain't scarce had a soul in here," declared the bartender, going back to his paper.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Patsy, in apparent disgust. "Mike over yonder said he saw him come in here about five o'clock, or a little later."

"Huh!" grunted the man. "*I* didn't see him."

Patsy did not think it advisable to press the matter. He had paid for the drink and now he strolled back to a glass at the rear of the saloon and began to arrange his tie. While doing so he observed that the bartender was watching him closely over the top of his paper.

"Ah? Something doing?" thought the acute young man. "Why so much interest displayed?"

Nevertheless, he coolly determined to convince himself that the fellow he was looking for was not then in the place—at least, on this floor. There was a men's hotel up-stairs, and he might be hidden away there. Or there might be a back way out of the place, and through rear yards, to another street.

However, Patsy turned after a minute and looked into the back-room. He had listened and heard nothing moving there, and a glance proved that it was indeed empty.

The lavatory was on his other hand. Patsy, still aware that the bartender was watching him, stepped into this room. It had not yet been cleaned up this

morning. As he came in Patsy had noticed that the porter seemed to be delinquent about his work around the saloon.

There was sawdust on the floor and a litter of papers in the corner. Patsy knew the room was empty, and he turned to depart himself after a moment, when his glance fell upon a scrap of paper, printed in red and black.

Memory flashed into the range of his mental sight a picture of the little wooden box that had been stolen that morning from Nick Carter's office. The express company's tag had been printed in red and black.

Patsy stooped and picked up the torn bit of paper. It *was* an express label, which had been wet and pulled off some package. That fact could not be doubted.

Suddenly Patsy heard a step coming toward the room. He hastily grabbed up all the bits of paper strewn about and thrust them into his coat pocket without looking at them. He was coming out of the room when the bartender faced him.

"What are you after here, anyway, 'bo?" demanded the man, scowling at the youth.

"Nothing that you can help me to, I reckon," replied Patsy cheerfully.

"Well, you get out. I think you're too inquisitive," growled the man.

"Well, well! ain't that funny? It's the second time I've been told that this morning," returned Patsy, with a grim chuckle.

CHAPTER V.

PIECING IT TOGETHER.

Patsy left the saloon without any further words. He did not care to get into any controversy with the bartender, who seemed "looking for fight"; besides, he might have occasion to come back again, and that would be time enough for a row!

For Nick Carter's young assistant had about made up his mind that there was something queer about either the man himself, or about the place. He would take Mike, the lunchman's word before the bartender's. The Unknown, dressed to represent Joseph, the valet, had gone into that saloon at an early hour. And he might be there still, for Mike had not seen him come out again.

"I've got to let some of the other boys in on this," muttered Patsy, as he plodded homeward. "I hate to ask help when it's my own foolishness that got me into the thing; but, by George! this is serious, Nick will certainly haul me over the coals. I must have been doped this morning to have let *anybody* walk away with that box—and directly after Nick had told me how important it was to keep it safe. Aw, I certainly have proved myself a soft-boiled and no mistake!" added Patsy in immense disgust.

"And the fellow's make-up was so perfect! Gee! I could have sworn it *was* Joseph. I—I—— Well! I'm glad I know that old Joseph has served the chief so long and well. I'd believe that there *was* something queer about him.

"See how all these other guys says it was him, too! The bull in harness, Jerry, the newsboy; Joe, the dago; Mike, the lunchman—five of us saw him, and saw him near enough to be sure it was Joseph! I declare! it's enough to make a feller feel goose-flesh all over him!" concluded Patsy, as he let himself into the house and made for his room very quietly so as not to be questioned at once.

First of all he wanted to piece together the scraps of paper he had found and see if any of them had to do with the wooden box which had been so oddly stolen.

The red and black express label had given Patsy the idea that the burglar might have had a reason for delivering the wooden box to his employers intact, but thought it would be wiser to destroy the marks and labels on it.

There was hot water in the saloon lavatory, and he might have soaked off the labels from the box and thrown them away.

And this certainly looked to be the case, when Patsy had spread out on a level surface all the bits of paper he had gathered from the floor.

Some of the bits had nothing to do with the case, Patsy was sure. There were cigarette papers, and bits of letters and envelopes, and various scraps which would naturally have been collected during the day and brushed into a pile by the porter the night before. He had not yet gathered them up.

Patsy pieced out the whole of the express label the first thing, for that was easy. It was marked "Baltimore" and "Paid" and Patsy's confidence grew apace.

He found scraps of another gummed sheet, too. Parts were missing, for the paper had been torn badly. But that it was one that had been soaked was evident, and it had the name of the same express company stamped upon it, too.

Finally he placed together three or four of these bits that had writing on them. And Nick Carter's hand was not easily mistaken by any one who knew it

as well as Patsy! Without a shadow of doubt this was the label that Nick himself had put upon the box.

Patsy had followed the slight clue to this present conclusion without an error. He knew where the Unknown went directly from the house and that he had removed from the box all traces which would make it easy to be recognized at a glance.

But where was he now? And where was the box?

It was not hard to believe that the box and its contents were intact. Abe Grout and Shade were not in New York. At least, they had not been there at the hour when the box was stolen. Patsy was amply sure of that!

Now, this burglar, whoever he was, was not a principal in the Blaney-Lowell matter, Patsy knew. He would not destroy the evidence that Nick had sent home in the box. That was impossible!

And why? Because crooks of his class do not do things for love, but for money. He would be paid for stealing the box—*but not until he could show the box, letter, and all, intact!*

There was no doubt but that the burglar would either take the box to his employers, or they would come to him and get it, paying him his wages. The trite saying "honor among thieves" is a saying only! One crook never trusts another *as a crook!* The denizens of the Under World are not only at war with society, but are usually at war with each other.

Patsy knew that the man who had masqueraded as Joseph, the valet, and had stolen the box, would probably still have it in his possession unless he had left the city to carry it to those who had hired him to steal it.

He might be on his way to Baltimore even now. Had Patsy known whether Nick was in the last named city, or not, he would have tried to communicate with him. But, although he could have reached Nick by the way of Washington, it would take probably two days. In that time, Patsy thought, the box would be in the hands of Grout, or Shade, and the letter destroyed, unless he could find some means of catching the thief, and obtaining the box, at once!

As far as Nick Carter's young assistant could see, the first thing to do was to identify the burglar. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack to hunt for the masquerader without knowing *who* he was.

Thus far Patsy had not succeeded in finding anybody who had seen the thief in his own proper person—unless, by chance, it might be the bartender of Ryan's café. And that individual plainly would not tell what he knew unless he was *made* to tell.

And how to make him? Well, that seemed at the moment to be impossible.

Meanwhile Patsy ruminated upon how the burglar could have got out of the saloon again, at that early hour, without Mike, the lunchman, on the other corner, seeing him. Mike was bright-eyed and gossipy. He had marked the supposed Joseph enter, and he had watched to see him reappear. He was not likely to have overlooked the man.

Was the fellow still somewhere in Ryan's place? Patsy, by pulling the right wires, could have the hotel raided and examine everybody in the place. But this would cost money.

As far as he had seen there was no back entrance to Ryan's place—no escape through the rear premises for the man. Then, where was he, if he had not come out?

And just at this point an idea smote Patsy, and smote him hard!

"Oh, gee!" he exclaimed. "I'm going dotty, sure enough. Why didn't I think of that before? The guy didn't go into Ryan's just to soak the labels off his box. Not by a long chalk!

"He must have been there some minutes to do that, anyway. And, meanwhile? Sure! *He was changing his clothes!*

"Gee! that's as plain as a pikestaff—whatever thing *that* is! Mike saw what he supposed to be Joseph go into Ryan's saloon; but, of course, he didn't see him come out.

"The lad that come out was an entirely different sort of a looking one. That's what's the matter with Hannah! I'll bet a dollar that smirky Johnny behind Ryan's bar knows the crook who pulled this game off, and he is in on the lay!"

CHAPTER VI.

CHICK ON DECK.

At the very moment Patsy came to this conclusion, there was a rap on his door, and in answer to his voice Joseph looked in.

"He's come," said the valet solemnly.

"Who's come?" demanded Patsy, starting up. "Not Nick!"

"Mr. Carter?" returned Joseph, in scorn. "If I knew where he was to be reached at once, I certainly should ask him to return. This is Mr. Chickering."

"Hully chee! Chick?" queried the youngster. "Oh,

well! he's as bad as Nick himself. I suppose there's the devil to pay, and no pitch hot. Wants to see me?"

"He does," returned Joseph.

"Where is he?"

"In the office—with Mr. Ten-Ichi."

Ten-Ichi had come over from Japan on a business and social visit, the week before.

Patsy gathered up his scraps of paper and followed the valet to the work-room in which, so early that morning, he had seen, as he believed, Joseph remove the little wooden box.

"You have had no breakfast, Master Patsy," declared Joseph, in a low voice.

"I had a cup of coffee. I'm too worried to fool with eating now. That fellow's got to be caught."

"He'll be better caught on a full rather than an empty stomach," said Joseph.

"Hang breakfast!" growled Patsy, and flung into the office.

Chick and Ten-Ichi sat talking when the door opened and Chick looked up quickly with a smile of welcome.

"Hello, Patsy!" he said.

Patsy nodded and sullenly dropped into a chair.

"I hear there's been something doing here," pursued Nick Carter's first assistant.

"I've been doing all I could to make an unmitigated ass of myself," growled Patsy.

"I do not wish to make Mr. Patsy out as guilty of any wrong-doing," said Joseph hesitatingly. "But I must repeat, Mr. Chickering, that I have had nothing whatever to do with the disappearance of the box in question. It is due to myself to say it."

"Oh, that's all right, Joseph!" declared Chick. "We've heard your story and we understand. You're excused. Somebody has boldly fooled us—they would not have dared tackle the job had Nick been at home, of course. No use crying over spilled milk. We'll do what we can to repair the evil."

Joseph retired and Chick leaned across the table and slapped Patsy on the shoulder.

"Buck up, my son!" he advised. "Now, let's hear about this? Just what happened, anyway?"

Patsy repeated, briefly but in detail, how he had heard from Nick over the wire about the valuable contents of the box, and how immediately following that he had seen—as he thought—Joseph removing the box and carrying it down-stairs to put in the vault.

"Why didn't you make sure what he was going to do with it?" demanded Chick, when Patsy had come to the point where Joseph's own story began.

"Oh, the old duffer is always interfering. He's so blamed particular, don't yer know," growled Patsy. "He seems to think it's his duty to pick up all the tag-ends of things—everything anybody chances to neglect, or forget——"

"I understand," interrupted Chick, with a quiet smile. "You knew that you ought to have taken better care of that box in the first place, eh?"

"Oh, hang it! how did I know what was in it?" demanded Patsy.

"Don't get in a rage. For the very reason that you *didn't* know what it contained, you should not have left it here on the table. And knowing that to be the case, you were a little sore that Joseph should consider it *his* duty to take charge of it. That was it, eh?"

"Well—perhaps," admitted Patsy grudgingly.

"I see. And, of course, there was absolutely no reason for believing that it was *not* Joseph you saw?"

"I should say not! And I've found four others who thought it was him, too."

"Hold on!" interrupted Ten-Ichi. "Have we got at the bottom of this yet, Chick?"

"I reckon not," was the smiling reply. "Patsy, I suppose, wishes that we were at the bottom of it."

"I mean, how could it be possible for any crook, no matter how well he may have studied Joseph's peculiarities of appearance and manner, and, however well he may have become acquainted with the house—how could it be possible for him to know just where Patsy had placed that important box, so that he could go right to the room and take it?"

"Gee!" exclaimed Patsy. "That's right."

"The man must be a wonderfully knowing fellow," pursued Ten-Ichi. "It seems to me that, given such a happening in any other house, we would think that he must have had inside help."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Chick. "I hope you don't suspect that Joseph——"

"Aw, shucks!" interrupted Patsy. "Nobody's accusing Joseph. But it *does* look strange."

"The servants are all so trustworthy," added Ten-Ichi.

"Now, boys, we're on the wrong track," declared Chick, with confidence. "Inside information this fellow must have had; but no help from the occupants of the house, that is positive!

"I see how this seeming mystery may be explained, however. Chance aided him in his search for the thing he came for. A moment's thought will prove this.

"Suppose he knew exactly what he was supposed

to find. That is more than probable. He was after a small wooden box, about so big, which had been delivered here by the express company and was addressed to Nick, and in Nick's own handwriting. In addition, it had come from Baltimore.

"Now, the fellow might have known all, or several, of these facts. Plenty to work on, but he might find the house rather large to search for the box.

"Joseph has told me that he looked the house over from attic to cellar and that nothing is disturbed. The man made no search of the premises for the box. He seems to have gone straight to the office, 'lifted' the thing, and then skipped."

"What did I say?" cried Ten-Ichi. "He must have known something——"

"He did. But he got his information after coming into the house."

"Rats, Chick!" cried Patsy. "Who did he get it from? You'll be telling me I talk in my sleep next?"

"At least, you talked into the telephone," said Chick dryly.

"Holy mackerel!" ejaculated Patsy, while Ten-Ichi's face lit up suddenly.

"That's right," said Chick, nodding. "I see you catch my meaning. Mr. Crook was in the house when Joseph called you, Patsy, to talk with Nick in Baltimore. He overheard much of your conversation. Of course, in talking to one over the wire, it is only common practise to repeat aloud a good deal that the other fellow says. Understand? He heard you tell Nick, anyway, that you had placed the box on the office table.

"Now, he was not losing any chances. He walked right to the office—or to the room he thought was the office, and he took the box.

"He did not know the house as well as you know it. Probably he did not realize that he was watched at all. But he was made up so well to look like Joseph, that, being seen, he was not suspected.

"It's blamed unlucky, Patsy, that you let him go down-stairs without following him. He walked out of the house—by one of the doors——"

"The area door," said Patsy, with a groan.

"Sure?"

"Let me tell you," returned Patsy, and he proceeded to relate for the edification of Chick and Ten-Ichi how he had traced the Unknown along the two blocks and into Ryan's saloon.

He showed them, too, the scraps of paper which proved his evidence valuable and likewise mentioned the suspicion he had that the crook shifted his disguise in the lavatory of the café.

"And that slick guy in the white apron behind Ryan's bar knows who the fellow is—or he knows more than he ought to about him. That is as sure as can be," declared Patsy. "I'd like to have squeezed his neck until he gave up!"

"You'd better leave that to me," said Chick. "If worse comes to worst we may have to try rough-house measures. But I know that bartender, Patsy. He's an ex-pug, named Dennahy, and he'd not do a thing to you!"

"All right. I'm mad enough to whip my weight in wild-cats," growled Patsy.

"But he's over your weight," said Chick dryly. "Let's not talk fight. Let's look at the thing as it stands. I do not believe that the crook is in Ryan's place now. It would not be wise for him to cover his trail no further than that."

"And where has he gone? To Baltimore?" asked Ten-Ichi.

"We'll hope not. But the first thing is to communicate with Nick. I'll write him to the Blank Hotel in Washington, and send it on by special delivery. He'll get it to-night or early to-morrow morning.

"Meanwhile, do you change your looks a bit, Ten-Ichi, if you're in with us, and hang about Ryan's and the vicinity, and see if you can pick up any crumbs of information.

"Patsy, I've got a scheme for you. It's like this: If that fellow changed his clothes and removed his disguise, in Ryan's, and went away, I guarantee the disguise was removed with him."

"I don't suppose the bartender would knowingly let him leave such incriminating evidence there," admitted Patsy thoughtfully.

"Right. He carried the box away from here in a gunny-sack. He soaked the labels off the box in the saloon, and probably carried it openly in his hand when he went out—or else made a different-looking package of it. Now, what do you suppose became of the gunny-sack?"

"I don't know," said Patsy, in a worried tone.

"I'll give you a tip on that," said Chick, smiling. "It's worth following up. Here it is," and he beckoned Patsy nearer and whispered several sentences in his ear.

"Thunder!" exclaimed the other. "I never thought of it."

"Think of it now," said Chick dryly, "and get along with you. I must write to Nick."

CHAPTER VII.

A JUDICIAL PROBLEM.

From the moment Nick Carter, in Baltimore, had telephoned to Patsy regarding the box containing the oyster and the torn letter, the great detective had been a very busy man.

Nick had experienced some pretty exciting hours since arriving in Baltimore with the precious box,* and he had to get to Washington as soon as he could after visiting the local hospital.

A man who had befriended him, Ian Campbell, the owner of the yacht in which Nick had come north from Tangier Sound, had been injured, and was then in the hospital. Nick knew well that Paul G. Shade's pretty niece, Lora Price, was as much interested in Campbell, as that young millionaire was in her!

Shade had used Campbell's interest in Lora on several occasions until the young man suspected that Shade was a trickster. Nick considered Lora a girl who, under other circumstances, and out from under her uncle's influence, would be an honor to her sex. He had gone to Washington and told Lora of Campbell's injury, and how foully Shade had dealt with her lover.

It was this and another matter which had kept Nick in Washington over the next night and long enough at the Blank Hotel to receive by special delivery the long letter of explanation which Chick had written regarding the loss of the valuable box.

And, strangely enough, when Nick received this epistle from Chick, he had just been perusing another very important communication that a messenger had put in his hand shortly before. This read as follows:

"DEAR CARTER: I am informed, on examination, that the government telegrapher, evidence against whom you filed with us, although proven conclusively to be in the employ of the Blaney-Lowell interests, could not by any possibility have had fore-knowledge of Judge Simon Bernard's decision in previous case. *That* leak is not explained. The president is anxious for you to take up that phase of the matter again, and, if possible, to get at the truth, and the whole truth, touching the case against Judge Bernard.

"Respectfully, R. PYLE."

Not many days before Nick had been called into serious conference with the chief executive of the nation. It was known to the president, and to his secretary, Mr. Pyle, through their secret agents, that Nick Carter was engaged in running down the Blaney, Lowell & Co. people. One of the biggest things Shade and Grout had pulled off was a Wall Street coup that necessitated their knowing several days in advance of a United States supreme court decision, written by Judge Simon Bernard.

It was bad enough for the public at large to suspect for a moment, that a supreme court judge had played into the hands of Wall Street gamblers. But in this case the administration itself was particularly interested.

As the president had explained to Nick, he was about to inaugurate a new and important portfolio in his cabinet. A new department was to be added to the governmental machinery, the work and influence of which would be far-reaching and of great moment.

A man of broad legal talent and absolutely unimpeachable honesty was needed for the head of this department, and the president had picked Judge Bernard for the office.

But if any suspicion attached to his name, or the least smirch of dishonesty stained his judicial robe, not only was the famous judge unworthy to hold his present office, but the president could not nominate him for the secretaryship of the new department.

In running down the Wall Street plotters, Nick had discovered that they were in communication with a certain government telegrapher who, while sending the important messages to various trusted officials, boldly wired Shade at Baltimore certain facts that enabled that individual to plan his stock gambling campaigns with a certain knowledge of immediate events that the other members of the financial world did not possess.

Only a few hours before, Nick Carter had been able to overhear one of these private messages, and learned what use Shade and Abe Grout were to make of the advance information in Wall Street.

To trick them—and likewise to show the Stock Exchange Association how easily it was done—Nick got ahead of the tricksters, and besides pricking the bubble of the tricksters' hopes, turned a handsome profit for himself.

Nick had presumed that in catching the one governmental telegrapher, he had found the sole guilty person in the employ of the administration. This note from Mr. Pyle denied this to be the fact. Judge Bernard's skirts were not yet cleared, and the detective had something else to do.

Had this not been the case nothing would have held Nick another hour in Washington. The story Chick told him by letter was bound to disturb the detective greatly. He had banked all on the evidence he had

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 617.

sent home from Baltimore in the little box. And that evidence had been stolen and was even then, perhaps, in Grout's or Shade's hands!

Nick Carter never lost his head, however. He realized that, whatever could be done, was being done, or had been done, by his assistants. His rushing home now would not help matters. In all probability, the others had either recovered the box, got the scoundrel who had robbed the house in such a curious way, or the game was over and Shade had again taken the stakes.

If the last was the case it would necessitate more work and worry to connect Abe Grout with the Blaney, Lowell & Co., and as he was the backer of the concern—the "man higher up"—Nick did not wish to punish the others without being able to send Abe up with them.

Nick did not allow himself to worry over this possibility. Instead he took hold of the Judge Bernard matter with zest. It would serve, at least, to keep his mind so engaged that he would have no time to wonder if Chick and the others were successful in their attempt to recover the stolen box.

The case against Judge Bernard was a delicate matter. The secret service men had been unable to either connect the judge with the fact of the leak, or to disprove that he had been unconscious of it.

The decision in question had been written by Judge Bernard alone. His associates had agreed to this, and he alone knew what the decision was to be until a few hours before it was made public. Yet fully twenty-four hours previous to the time when the decision was in the hands of the other supreme court justices, Blaney, Lowell & Co. had laid their plans for their sensational raid on the market.

"Shade must have got at that decision in some different way. He did not get it over his private wire to the old mansion outside of Baltimore where he and Abe hived me up night before last.*

"And I wonder," pursued Nick thoughtfully, "if that disguise that Shade and his niece were in the habit of adopting, had not something to do with his gaining inside information about Washington here, too.

"They did not dress up as 'Mr. and Mrs. William Furtz' for nothing—that has been proven. And from what I learn that supposedly ancient couple have been going about Washington for the last month or so, visiting all the public buildings, and making themselves familiar with the administration business.

"I wonder—now I wonder," pursued Nick, "if that girl will be sore enough on her uncle, after the way he's treated young Campbell, to give the game away? Humph! I'll go out and telegraph her for news of Campbell. That will keep me in touch with her, at least."

It was a small thing to do—almost a blind move in the game. Yet after events proved that the thought in Nick's mind was father to important discoveries.

He left his hotel and walked to the nearest telegraph-office. It chanced to be one of the principal district offices of the Western Union Company in the city, and there were several clerks and a number of instruments.

There was a noisy clatter of sounders when Nick opened the door—to a person unused to the telegraph-instrument, a confusing clatter. But Nick was no poor operator himself, and he could read by ear almost as well as a professional.

When he went in, however, he chanced to see first of all a ruddy-faced old man, dressed in garments of ancient cut and style, who leaned against the counter and gazed almost directly at Nick as he entered the place.

The detective himself was startled by the meeting; but the old gentleman gave never a sign that he saw Nick.

Indeed, he stood there, his eyes fixed, his back turned to the room in which an incessant clatter of sounders kept up, and he might have been in a day-dream.

Nick, without stopping to send his message, or do any business, turned his face swiftly away and stepped back into the street.

The old man stood without moving for some moments. Nick, peering through the window, finally beheld him turn away, pass his hand over his face nervously, and then come slowly to the door.

"He was listening! By Jove! he was listening so intently to the message coming over some wire there, that he was lost to everything else about him," thought Nick.

"He did not notice me. He's not seen me now—and he won't at present—I'll see to *that*.

"He's come back to Washington as Furtz, and for a purpose. He must know that I'm onto his disguise, yet he assumes it again.

"This puzzles me—it certainly does! I knew Shade was an old operator, and I heard him sending and receiving messages the other night. But why does he

*See Nick Carter Weekly, No. 617.

hang about regular telegraph-offices and listen to news off the wire?

"There is indeed a mystery here, and it must be fathomed."

CHAPTER VIII.

PATSY FOLLOWS THE SCENT.

Let us now transfer the scene to Manhattan, where Nick Carter's three assistants were having their hands full in trying to run to earth the man who had stolen the important box from Nick's office—and to regain possession of the box itself if possible.

Patsy had shown much perseverance and sharpness in following the faint clue of the disguised man to Ryan's saloon, two blocks away. The scraps of paper he had picked up there, which proved to be the labels off the stolen box, were likewise good evidence as to where the man had gone, and suggested connivance with somebody—probably the bartender—in the café.

But Patsy had come to the end of his rope there. He could go no farther. He believed that the burglar had changed from his disguise, and walked out of the saloon in his own proper person. Where had he gone directly therefrom, and who was he?

These questions looked, to Patsy, to be unanswerable; but Chick's trained mind had seen a possibility that had not been noted by Patsy. And he had suggested to his young companion a course that might prove in the end to answer both queries.

Patsy *did* stop for a bit of breakfast at Joseph's earnest solicitation—"just to show that there was no hard-feelings."

Then he was off in a hurry for the East Side. He did not go far away from the corner on which Ryan's café stood, and, keeping to the avenue, he marked each shop carefully as he passed. Within three or four blocks he saw his first second-hand clothing-store.

A typical Son of Judah kept the store, and he was looking wistfully up and down the street for a customer. He brightened up at Patsy's approach, but shook his head and relapsed into mournfulness again when Patsy had preferred his request.

"No, shentlemans. So hellup me! I haf nodt made von sale, nor haf I bought von t'ing this day! Trade vas awful—just awful!"

"This feller came along here this morning about half-past five or six o'clock. He carried some clothes in a sack, and he had a small box in his hand, I believe. Didn't he offer the clothing to you?"

"Ach! At dot time? Oi, oi, oi, oi! I vas nod up and had mein store open by den! Undt you say I miss a goot pargain?"

"Betcher life! Missed one coming and going—both ways! He'd have sold the duds to you cheap, and I'd have bought them back at a fancy price. Teach you to be the early bird hereafter."

He left the Jew wringing his hands, and went on to the next shop of the same character. He was taking a chance, of course, in considering that the man who had masqueraded as Joseph, went down the avenue after leaving Ryan's. Still, Patsy had a reason for so believing.

Mike, the oyster-stand proprietor, had clearly described the fellow as he entered Ryan's saloon. He had noted the gunny-sack particularly. Another man, differently dressed, leaving the saloon within a short time thereafter, would surely have attracted Mike's shrewd comment—especially if *he* carried a bag, too.

There were two doors to Ryan's place, and Mike's stand was so situated diagonally across the street from it that anybody leaving the side door of Ryan's and going easterly on the block, would be seen clearly—and for the length of the entire block—from Mike's window.

Whereas, a person leaving the front door of Ryan's, and turning immediately down the avenue, would be out of Mike's sight very shortly. Besides, supposing the man had gone this way, and carried the bag between his body and the inner side of the walk, Mike, at his distance, would scarcely have noticed it.

Therefore, Patsy, after receiving Chick's suggestion that the first act of the escaping burglar would be to get rid of his disguise, had figured out his route himself.

He knew that there were several old-clo'-shops south of Ryan's on the avenue; one of them the man would probably find open even at that hour of the morning—between five and six—and Patsy began with the first one, as we have seen, and kept on down the line.

The second shop adduced no information. At the third there was a woman in charge. She declared her husband had opened the shop early, but she did not know whether he had bought anything, or not. And she was very suspicious of Patsy and would not show him the stock, nor would she tell him when her "man" would come back.

Patsy was not prepared to make a row, or to try to force her to give him information. He was pretty certain, too, that if the man *had* bought the outfit the

crook had for sale, the wife would have known about it.

And so it went on. Patsy had gone about seven blocks, and was beginning to lose heart completely, when suddenly he spied a second-hand shop across the street, on the other side of the avenue.

"No law against his having gone over and done biz on the other side," muttered Patsy, and crossed to the west side of the avenue.

As he drew nearer, he saw a rotund little man, with a bald head and spectacles, reaching from a chair which he had brought out of the shop, to hang a coat upon the awning-frame in front. He was evidently the proprietor of the shop, and by his little, twinkling eyes, which seemed to spy Patsy as a possible customer while yet he was far away, the latter decided that he was too sharp a Hebrew to miss a good bargain if one happened along.

And then, as he came nearer, Patsy's eyes were attracted to the coat itself. It was a dull black garment, very decent-looking, with short tails, and very short-waisted. Joseph always insisted in wearing such an affair—it looked as though the waist of his coat was trying to crawl up under his shoulder-blades.

It had been this peculiarity that Patsy had particularly noted that morning, when the man whom he supposed to be Joseph's self, was marching down-stairs with the little wooden box under his arm.

"Hello, Pop!" exclaimed Patsy. "What's that coat worth?"

"Ah-ha! you are a smart young feller," declared the shopkeeper, looking at Patsy admiringly. "You vas quick to see a good t'ing—heh?"

"Sure! I spotted you half a block away," declared Patsy.

"Undt de coat, too, I'll be bound!" laughed the man. "Dot vas a fine garment."

"It was *once*," admitted Patsy.

"Ah! It iss so now."

"What! after you've had it in the shop for six months? Why! it's shopworn."

"Now, dot iss vare you make a mistake, mein friendt," declared the little man solemnly, taking the garment down and turning it around and around, the better to display its beauties. "I tell you solemnly—on mein vord, dot coat has not been two hours by mein store—so hellup me!"

"Aw, g'wan!" scoffed Patsy.

"I take mein oath! You can dake me to de sheep-butcher! I mean vot I say. I only bought dot coat of a shentlemans dis morgen yedt! On my vor-r-rd!"

"That gentleman must have been up early," cried Patsy.

"Ah! he vas *hardt* up!" admitted the Jew.

"This morning, eh?"

"Sure it vas. I had only joost opened," declared the shopkeeper. "I haf joost brushed it. It iss almost new, as you can see."

"And he sold you a green and gray mixed vest, and a pair of brown pants, eh? And he brought them all in a gunny-sack? Am I right?"

Patsy fired these queries at him rapidly, watching the effect on the Jew as he spoke. The man's face fell and his disappointment was very great.

"Ach! you don't mean to tell me dot dem clodings vas *stolen?*" he cried.

"Let me see 'em," commanded Patsy. "If they're the things I think them——"

"Vell, vell?"

"They're *not* stolen; and I'll give you more for them than anybody else would pay."

"Ah-ha!" cried the Jew, his little eyes twinkling. "Someting vas los'—heh? In de pockets, eh?"

He rushed inside, feeling of the pockets in the coat, as he went. Patsy, chuckling inordinately, followed.

"No, indeed. Nothing of the kind," cried the detective, when he could catch the man. "I reckon you can have all that's in the pockets."

Already the shop-keeper had dropped the coat and grabbed up a pair of pants that answered Patsy's description. He rammed his fat hand into first one pocket and then the other. Suddenly he squealed and brought to light something clutched tightly in his fingers.

Patsy looked on in amazement. It was a yellow paper and crackled in the Jew's eager paw. For a moment the man evidently thought he had secured a prize—a yellow-backed banknote.

Then his pudgy face changed and he exploded with disgust.

"Ach! dot vas nodding! A telegraph-despatch—dot vas all!"

"What!" cried Patsy, springing forward.

It was his turn to get excited. He snatched the crumpled paper from the Jew's hand and smoothed it out carefully.

CHAPTER IX.

CHICK TAKES A CHANCE.

"Say! vot iss dot, heh?" cried the storekeeper, making a grab for the paper that he had previously scorned.

"Hands off!" commanded Patsy. "Don't trouble with it. I've got what I wanted, I reckon!"

He backed off toward the door, scrutinizing the telegram. The Jew went crazy immediately.

"You vos a cheater! A cheater!" he bawled. "I am robbed! Police!"

"Aw, forget it!" advised Patsy. "What are you robbed of?"

The avaricious old fellow stammered and stuttered, but could not answer intelligibly. He knew that Patsy had found something of importance to *him*—and he had been foolish enough to let the young fellow have it without dickering.

"You vill buy de suit, anyvay?" he demanded, almost weeping.

"Was it brought here by a guy this morning?"

"I told you so," declared the man.

"And he had the duds in a gunny-sack?"

"He did. Oh, you know he did!" wailed the Jew.

"Did he sell you anything else?"

"Not a thing! So hellup me!"

"What else did he carry beside the sack?"

"Eh? Vot else he had for sale?"

"No. But he had something with him, didn't he?"

"Eh? Oh, Abraham and Isaac!" ejaculated the Jew. "It iss de box you mean!"

"You win!" declared Patsy, with a groan. "That's the identical thing. The box. A little square wooden box. He had it?"

"He did."

"Then we're on the right track," said Patsy, calming down, "and I'll give you twenty dollars for the coat, pants, and vest."

"*Vot!*" shouted the other. "I am robbed alretty!"

"All right. Suit yourself," grinned Patsy. "I ain't so stuck on buying the togs, anyway. *This* is really all I wanted," and he shook the paper in the air triumphantly.

"And vot iss dot?" cried the man.

"Curious powder, to make chumps like you ask questions," returned the young fellow, grinning. "Do you take it, or leave it?"

"But I am losing money!"

"Then sell the duds to somebody else."

"Perhaps the man vot sold dem vould gif me more," said the old fellow shrewdly.

"What kind of a looking guy was he?" asked Patsy thoughtfully.

"Ve-ell! I vos not sure dot I could tell——"

"Don't trouble to," returned the youth, seeing that the grasping Jew would probably not tell him the truth now. "And, any rate, he won't give you much for the clothes, now that I have *this*," and he waved the paper again.

"Oh, vell—I will dake——"

"Twenty dollars—not a cent more," declared Patsy.

"Ah! for vy you be so oogly? Of coorse, I dake twenty," said the clothing-storekeeper soothingly.

So Patsy departed with the bundle of clothing and the telegram. The latter was his chief prize, however, although his first reading of it had told him very little.

When he passed Ryan's on his way home, he saw a bearded man with a patch over his eye hanging about the door. By a signal the fellow passed him, Patsy knew that it was Ten-Ichi, "on the job." But the Jap likewise passed him the news that he had discovered nothing further suspicious about Ryan's place.

"And he won't find the guy we're looking for *there*," muttered Patsy, referring again to the telegram he had secured in so unexpected a manner. "That ain't the joint where the gun hangs out, sure!"

Arriving at the house Patsy found that Chick had written and sent his letter to Nick and was ready himself to take a principal hand in the tracing of the burglar who had masqueraded as Joseph.

When the valet was brought in to view the garments Patsy had purchased of the old-clo'-man, he certainly was an amazed person. His jaw dropped and he handled the coat, vest, and trousers as though he scarcely thought them real.

"Didn't know you set the fashions, eh?" cried Patsy belligerently. "I reckon you thought I was stringing you—eh? Well, there's the duds the guy wore, and if you'd seen him yourself, you'd have thrown a fit! you'd thought sure you'd seen your own ghost, old man!"

Joseph slowly shook his head. He could not imagine where the burglar had obtained the clothing. His own garments were ancient enough—all but the coat—and it would seem as though nobody could have matched that old vest of his. The only difference between his own garments and these Patsy had bought were that the latter were almost brand new while Joseph's clothing had seen some considerable service.

"All right," commented Chick, dismising the valet. "We know that Patsy hasn't been talking through his hat, that's sure. If the fellow was Joseph's size there's little wonder you thought it was *he* who took the box. Now, Patsy, what else did you find?"

Patsy, with an enigmatical smile, placed the telegram found in the pocket of the trousers he had purchased from the Jew, and which they had every reason to sup-

pose had been worn by the crook who had robbed the house that morning.

The telegram had been received at midnight in New York, and had come over the Baltimore wire. Address and message read as follows:

"THOMAS EDNY, Connorton's Café,
"—— First Avenue, N. Y. City.
"Sealed box delivered N. C. to-night. 8 inches square. Wells-Fargo express. Important. Try Joseph. Hold for me.—S."

Chick studied the message vaguely for a moment, and then its full meaning flashed into his mind. He looked up at Patsy's excited face.

"And the gazabo did it!" cried the Irish detective, grinning.

"Well, it *does* look as though the receiver of this telegram had followed instructions. And we can presume Paul G. Shade to be the sender?"

"Betcher! Nick said something to me about being afraid that Shade might get into touch with somebody over here who would try to get the evidence. Gee! If Nick had only phoned me a couple of hours before."

"Well, what has happened can't be mended now. I make out of this telegram that we have been watched here much more closely than we supposed. This fellow, whoever he is, had prepared already to enter the house in the disguise, and Shade knew about it. By Jove! he may even have been in here before!"

"I'd like to have caught him at it and kicked him full of holes—that I would!" growled Patsy.

"I should say you caught him, all right; but you did not appreciate your discovery," chuckled Chick. "But there's another point here that is well to make note of, Patsy."

"What's that?" demanded the other. "I don't suppose for a minute that 'Thomas Edny' is the guy's name, do you?"

"No, no!"

"Or that they'd tell you anything about him at Connorton's place."

"I'll look into that later," said Chick. "But here's the point: 'Hold for me,' says Shade. By George, Patsy! that box is still in the possession of the fellow who stole it."

"Whew! you're right."

Chick got up at once and put away the telegram.

"I'm going to have a look around that Connorton place. I've got something for you to do meanwhile, Patsy. Come on into Nick's dressing-room while I make up, and I'll put you wise."

CHAPTER X.

THE "PADDED HOOF" GANG.

There is a growing danger—an increasing menace to the public peace of New York City. This "festering sore on the body politic" is the gang.

The element of crime may not enter into the original formation of these gangs. They are often called "associations" and are named after certain politicians of the baser sort.

But as they are used for criminal purposes on primary and election days, they soon attract to their standards criminals of other sort than election-fraud helpers.

Their headquarters are more often than not in some saloon. Toughs of the neighborhood hang about the saloon, knowing that occasionally the lower class politicians come there for helpers, and wherever the ward-heeler goes, free drinks are dispensed with lavish hand.

By and by a little coterie of toughs, dock-rats, strong-arm men, and third-rate crooks of every kind, hang about the headquarters of the organization day and night. This coterie become in reality "the gang."

A drunken man with money is considered their legitimate prey. They have been known to rush such a one in from the street, to the very bar of one of these saloons, and rob and batter their victim on the barroom floor. The bartender, or the saloon proprietor, gets his "rake off," and if the policeman on the beat is crooked, he has *his* share. If the cop chances to be honest he is in danger of his life every time he interferes with the gangsters.

Connorton's Café was the head joint for the "Padded Hoof" gang who were plug-uglies without any trimmings! They were not much of a political organization, although they voted "early and often" at election time.

They were mostly young men, supposedly dock-laborers and other unskilled workers. In truth, most of them never did an honest day's work. They spent their time drinking and carousing, and fighting other gangs in the neighborhood, and likewise in that employment which is the acme of the hoodlum's joy—cop-baiting. An unpopular officer on the beat was "nuts" for the Padded Hoofs.

Chick Carter, Nick's chief assistant, knew well enough the nature of Connorton's place, and the kind of people in it, before he ever put foot over the threshold.

He was well aware that there were several very hard

citizens to be run up against in Connorton's dive, and that, besides these, there were members of the "underworld" fraternity who had been "mugged and measured" by the police of every big city in the country.

According to Chick's figuring the crook who had pulled off this trick for Paul G. Shade—who had stolen the box with the letter in it, and had fooled Patsy so well by his disguise—must be of some importance in the under world.

If he received his mail at Connorton's, under this assumed name, he must likewise be permanently settled somewhere in the neighborhood, or the telegram would not have reached him after midnight to have enabled him to turn the trick at Nick Carter's at five o'clock in the morning.

In preparing to go to the café, Chick had not done much in the way of disguising himself. Wigs, or false beards, or anything of that kind, no matter how well arranged, would not serve him if he should get into any real trouble.

"Trouble" at a place like Connorton's means a knock-down and drag-out fight. Wigs and such would have been torn off in a hurry, and Chick's finish would have been sudden and complete if any of the roughs thought he was a spy, or a "plain-clothes wise guy."

Chick had dressed roughly; and he had painted himself a black-eye with consummate skill. Besides, he had not yet shaved when Joseph had sent for him in such haste, and now he darkened his stubble of beard so that his face appeared much rougher than it was.

With the slouch and furtive look of an habitué of such dens as this of Foxy Connorton's, Chick went into the place a little while after noon.

The "lunch-trade" was over, and it was an hour when, in the back rooms of such places, little knots of dissipated-looking men gather and with their heads together whisper confidences, or lay plans for future "work."

Sometimes these groups are nothing worse than "policy" sellers, or touts for racing men, or gambling-houses. But in Connorton's such a group was likely to have members of the real "profesh" among them—burglars, safe-breakers, confidence men, and their ilk.

Chick slouched up to the bar, laid down a ten-cent piece, and winked at the broad-faced bartender on duty.

"Gimme a Thomas Edny," croaked Chick hoarsely.

The bartender eyed him with peculiar disfavor.

"Come again, 'bo!" he advised.

"Ain't onto dat, heh?"

"Is it a new drink they're serving at Sherry's?" queried the barman, with scorn. "You look like you'd been used to drinkin' there."

"Aw, say! None o' yer guff! Gimme a drink of gasoline an' tell Tommy Edny I wanter see him."

For a second the bartender's eye flickered toward the bunch of letters leaning against the cash-register. Chick knew immediately that the man was "on."

"I don't know the person," declared the white-aproned hustler, putting the bottle and glass before Chick.

"Well, he's de guy I wanter see. An' dis is pertic'lar," declared Chick, scowling.

"Take your drink and fade away, 'bo!" advised the bartender. "We've got nothing for you here."

"Say! Dis ain't no stall. I wanter see de guy. I'm *goin'* ter see de guy. It's important. De boss sent me——"

"What boss?" snapped the other quickly.

"Dat's *my* biz—an' his'n. Tommy Edny'll know. There's sumpin' gone wrong about that t'ing dat was pulled off dis mornin'," whispered Chick hoarsely. "Dere's de deuce ter pay—dat's right! I gotter see——"

The barkeeper turned away and shouted into the rear room:

"Say, Red! Come here."

Chick braced himself for what was coming. He believed he knew who the bartender had called. Usually such a place has a "bouncer"—the toughest and most pugilistic fellow in the gang. He is paid by the saloon to "quell trouble." That is, to shut off outside interference.

Instantly there came through from the rear room a husky, red-haired fellow, with hands like hams and muscles in his arms out of all comparison with the rest of his body. Chick guessed instantly that he had swung the sledge at one time, and had probably likewise developed his biceps and shoulder-muscles in the pugilistic ring. But he was weak on his legs.

"Say, Red," remarked the barkeeper, picking his teeth, "d'ye know any guy named Tom Edny? This feller's looking for him."

"Is *that* all he's looking for?" cried Red, with apparent frankness. "Then I can help him out!"

He swung forward in the friendliest manner, stuck out his hand as though to shake Chick's own, and all the time smiling broadly.

Chick had seen the trick performed before, and he should have been on his guard against it; yet the scoun-

drel looked so pleasant—was such a good actor, in fact—that he caught Chick napping.

Chick half-extended his own hand to grasp Red's, when the big fellow hit him a jolt over his left eye with his other fist that felt to Chick as though half his skull had been knocked off!

It was a wicked blow and was a signal for the remainder of the gang in back room, and on the side street, to pour in by both doors. There was a shout of "Something doing!" and the gang gathered as though by magic!

The blow would have knocked out an ordinary man; but Chick had been taught in a hard school, and he could stand a deal of punishment. Also, he had been taught this thing: When you go after a man, *get him!* He did not believe that this Red was the fellow who had stolen the box from Nick Carter's office that morning; Red was not that type of criminal. But the husky bully was shielding the man who turned the trick, and Chick proposed to get Red in limbo and force him to give up his chum.

These big, beefy fellows, always ready for a scrap, are the ones who the more easily give up information, and turn traitor on their pals, when they are cornered. Chick wanted Red, and he went after him!

Before the big brute could strike another blow, or any of the others could pile on, Chick's left hand shot out and he grabbed Red by the throat, swung him with all his force from the bar, and, having got him going, threw him through the swinging door onto his head on the sidewalk!

Chick did not propose to be knocked down and trampled on in that barroom. He would have a chance for his life outside, and likewise some cop might come to his assistance.

He broke away from those who would have held him—including the bartender who cleared the counter to aid in the struggle, and leaped through the door after Red.

But Red was there to receive him. While still on his back he caught Chick's ankles, and flung the young detective good and hard! But Chick was like a rubber-ball. He was only an instant on the walk. He bounced up, and, seizing Red by the neck, pulled him up with him.

"You are under arrest, Red! don't be a fool!" advised Chick, showing the badge that he had a right to wear. "You are resisting an officer. Don't be a fool!"

But Red only let out a yell like the bellow of a maddened bull, and set to work to "do" his antagonist if he could. He was biting, punching, and kicking, all at once. The others had piled out of the saloon after the combatants, and the cry was instantly raised of *"Kill the cop!"*

Chick had been in hot corners before, but this promised to be a memorable one, indeed. The roughs seemed to spring from the very ground, and they were around him as thick as flies around a molasses-jug.

He made Red catch some of the blows aimed at his own head, but they came so fast and furious that Chick was hit all over at once—and by almost every conceivable weapon besides fists and feet.

There was more than one slungshot swung, and Chick received a punch from one hoodlum with brass-knuckles, that pretty nearly broke him in two!

Chick caught this fellow, likewise by the neck, and, gripping both he and Red, swung them together hard! Their heads cracked, and they yelled blue murder. The street began to fill with sympathizers of the gang, or onlookers. Bits of brick and stones began to drop around Chick's head, for in such scrimmages, there are always boys and women affiliated with the gang who run to the roofs where they can do the most damage with the least chance of getting caught!

One of the combatants dug up a paving-stone from a mended place in the street, and yelling to his mates to get out of the way, charged through the gang and flung the missile with both hands at Chick's head.

But Chick saw it coming and dodged. Indeed, in dodging he yanked the second captive he had made—but without intention—directly in the path of the flying cobble. Crash! against his skull it went and, covered with blood, the fellow dropped nervelessly from Chick's grip and was trampled on by the blood-lusting mob.

Somebody behind got a knee in Chick's back again and he went down, Red on top of him. Red fought like a dozen catamounts, but while he was gyrating the others could not get near enough to injure Chick very severely.

One fellow, however, ran in with a bag of sand and dumped it on Chick's head. He came near being smothered before he could fight his way to his feet again, still clinging to Red's throat.

Moments seemed like hours now. Chick knew that he was fighting for his life. It was not merely to make a capture, or to get Red in limbo so that he could be used to run down greater criminals. It was a chance only if he got out of the scrimmage alive!

CHAPTER XI.

A FIGHT TO A FINISH.

Meantime, no officer had come to the rescue, nor did Chick ask for help of the better disposed citizens outside the gang. Indeed, they would not have dared interfere, for their lives would have been in jeopardy of the gang ever after!

And as Chick was not a uniformed officer, the news that had been sent to the precinct station put it that it was merely a fight between the Padded Hoofs and some other gang. As there was a chance of several tough citizens being "put away" in such a scrimmage, the police were not anxious to interfere.

Although the gang had used anything that came to hand as weapons, Chick had used only his fists as yet. To save his life now, however, he had to reach for his gun.

Indeed, he was only just in time for this move. Already somebody behind was reaching into his pistol-pocket!

But Chick grabbed the butt of the gun first and jerked it around in front. There Red seized his right hand, which held the revolver, and fought like a mad bull to get it away from him!

He bit and scratched and tore at Chick's hand, trying to get his thumb in his mouth to chew. But Chick had seen such fighters before, and he inflicted as much pain as he suffered. Indeed, he was strong enough to force the revolver around so that it was pointed directly for Red's heart!

"Give up, you scoundrels!" Chick cried, "or I'll send your leader to Hades!"

There was a mad outcry from the gang, and they came at Chick in a bunch. Red seemed unafraid of the threat, too, for he continued to struggle, and put the palm of his hand over the muzzle of the revolver so as to divert the course of the bullet.

"Confound you! If you *will* have it!" gritted Chick, and pulled the trigger!

But the gun did not explode. At the crucial moment another of the gang reached over Chick's shoulder and put his finger under the hammer, so that it did not reach the cartridge. Chick tried several times in succession to pull the trigger, but it would not work.

The struggle became gigantic! Blows were showered upon the detective like rain. He knew that he had been badly cut above his eyes and that the blood was running down and blinding him. He heard—as thought in the distance—a woman screaming.

It seemed to Chick as though he was trying to rescue that woman—that she was being manhandled by these thugs—that he only could save her life. He pounded away at Red's head with his free fist; but he only hit the object by chance and because Red was in his way. He no longer could see what he was doing, or whom he was hitting!

Both of Red's hands were free, and he was forcing the muzzle of Chick's revolver around. Finally it pointed to the detective's breast, and Chick heard some voice shriek:

"Now let him shoot!"

And he might have done it, the pressure under the hammer being removed, and so sent the bullet into his own body, had not there come a sudden intervention in his favor.

Down the street came a file of cops, with a be-whiskered individual running beside their captain. This person's whiskers were very much askew, and he had lost a patch which he had worn over his eye. In other words, it was Ten-Ichi who, left as a guard on the outside of the café, when Chick entered, had finally got the police started to the rescue.

The reserves entered into the throng about Chick, nightsticks drawn and hitting a head wherever they saw one. Thus they quickly and methodically plowed their way into the heart of the fight—and they came in the nick of time!

That pistol might have been exploded in another moment. But instead, Chick felt the pressure of the fighting throng removed. He was given space and air!

He whipped the pistol back into his hip pocket and dashed the blood from his eyes with his hand. Before him he saw the distorted face of big Red, his fist raised for a final crashing blow in Chick's face!

"You're my meat *now*, Red!" cried the plucky detective.

He caught Red's descending wrist, and with a twist that Ten-Ichi had taught him, sent the big fellow, howling, on his back. There he set one foot squarely across the sobbing Red's throat, and found his handkerchief to clear his eyes more effectually.

"Is that you, Captain Devlin? I want this chap held. Will you see to it?"

"With the greatest of pleasure, my dear Alphonse!" returned the police captain, staring at him as he mopped his own feverish brow. "But who the devil are you?"

Chick passed him his name, while the cops began to return from their futile chase after the gang, which had separated without delay.

"Well, your own mother would scarce know you,

Mr. Carter," declared the police captain. "Aren't you hurt bad?"

"I don't know yet. But if I can see Patsy——"

A slight figure glided through the crowd and touched his arm. It was Patsy, disguised as a youth of the streets. His lips swept Chick's ear.

"I got 'em!" he whispered.

"All right, Patsy!" exclaimed Chick. "Help me out of this. Tell Ten-Ichi to find a cab. Wow! I guess I'm some marred up, ain't I?"

Had he come out of a hard-fought battle to the finish in the prize-ring, Chick would have looked no worse. He had suffered severe handling at the hands of the Padded Hoofs; and he had dealt out some serious punishment in return.

The boys got him into a cab and crowded in themselves, and the trio drove home. Patsy did not forget to telephone for a doctor, who was waiting for them when they arrived. Chick was under his hands for an hour, and after the man of medicine had departed the doughty Chick looked as though he had been through a more than ordinarily severe football-game!

His head was bandaged, and one arm, and he was warned to keep quiet, etc. But Chick was determined to continue the work that he had mapped out, and he made Patsy come in and report as soon as the doctor had gone.

"You said you got 'em?" he queried, between his swollen lips.

"I sneaked into the side door after the gang, and when the bartender jumped the bar, I slid behind and grabbed all the letters I saw," declared Patsy. "There was a big bunch of 'em; and there's one to Thomas Edny, as you thought, and it's stamped Baltimore. But, gee, Chick! I wish we'd tried for it in some other way?"

"Huh!" grunted Chick. "How would you do it? What did you do with the other letters?"

"I slipped 'em in the post-box."

"That's right. Never fool with Uncle Sam's mail," advised Chick grimly. "And that was the only way I saw of getting the letter I knew must have been sent later than the telegram to give that crook full particulars. We'll steam it open and see what Shade has to say to him."

"But we haven't caught the guy who done the trick here this morning yet," declared Patsy.

"That's all right. "You'll go around and make Red give up his name. He'll be in a good mood by this time. The police doctors will be through with him. Make him talk. I tell you, Patsy, I'll have the fellow, and the box before morning—perhaps before Nick can get my letter.

"Red will talk; I know his breed. He's strong when it comes to a bull-fight; but he's laid on his back now for some time, besides seeing a promise of a stretch of some months for assault before him. Offer him anything in reason, but make him talk. That's all you've got to do, Patsy."

"Holy mackerel!" cried Patsy. "That sounds like a cinch, don't it? Well—I—guess—nit! But I'll do my best, Chick, old man—I'll do my best!"

CHAPTER XII.

NICK CLOSES AN ACCOUNT.

Nick Carter spent a mighty busy day in Washington following his rediscovery of Paul G. Shade in disguise. Instead of making further inquiries regarding the doings of Shade and his niece and secretary, Miss Lora Price, in the capital city, he made it his study to learn all about the habits and movements of Mr. and Mrs. William Furtz.

At the Blank Hotel Mr. Shade had given up one of his apartments that the supposed old couple from the interior of New York State might have comfortable rooms. That made it easy for Shade and his niece to slip out of their regular apartments and appear in the ancient disguise whenever it suited their fancy.

When Nick had told Miss Lora of the injury to Ian Campbell, he had found her disguised as "Mrs. Furtz." Shade and Lora were supposed to be away from Washington at that time.

Now, after his experiences with the Wall Street man in Baltimore, Nick had found Shade again in the capitol city. And he had, too, discovered a new point regarding Mr. Shade's activities in his disguise.

During the day Nick had found time and opportunity to call up Miss Lora at Baltimore. He had had a long talk with the girl over the wire, and found her much softened and inclined, indeed, to be grateful to him.

She was nursing Ian Campbell, and he knew her, and was coming out all right. Nick did not ask her to tell him anything about her uncle and his business which would incriminate Shade; but some small matters she was willing to clear up for Nick.

"As soon as Mr. Campbell can be moved, we shall be married and go to sea in the *Spoondrift*. He has said it himself," the girl told Nick. "I am sorry for poor uncle. He has done much for me in the past. But he was needlessly brutal to Ian, and there he touched me harshly. I can never forgive him for his allowing poor Ian to be picked up like a pauper and carried to the public hospital-ward. And uncle's own hired thugs had injured Ian, too, as you told me.

"I shall never see Mr. Shade again—I hope. But, Mr. Carter, you must not expect me to turn traitor to him now. He is in serious enough trouble as it is. Something that he and Mr. Grout had in hand came out wrong, I understand, and, instead of making money, they have lost."

"Right you are! I saw to that myself," observed Nick, but *not* for her ear.

Then he congratulated Lora upon her forthcoming marriage, and sent a good word to Ian Campbell. This was only a part of his work during that day.

When he got back to the hotel at night there was a long telegram awaiting him from Chick and the boys. It was in cipher, and their private code was so arranged that a single word told a sentence or phrase. Nick, on perusing the message, had a very clear idea of what had been done by Chick, Patsy, and Ten-Ichi, following the robbery of the wooden box the previous morning, as related by Chick in his letter.

The detective read this message twice over, with grave and serious demeanor. Then he went to the desk and inquired for Mr. Furtz.

"Say, you're interested in that old chap, aren't you, Mr. Carter?" queried the clerk.

"That's not answering my question," reminded Nick.

"So you said once before. Well, he's not here."

"No?"

"Something funny about that old team," said the slangy clerk. "*She* lit out yesterday, while he was away. And now he's gone himself."

"Baggage and all?"

"Sure! Wonder if the city's been too much for the old lady? Suppose she's flew the coop—gone with a handsomer man, as you might say?"

"I've always admired your imagination," said Nick. "By the way, when did he go?"

"Oh, two hours ago."

"Just so. And—— Say! is Shade back yet?"

"Mr. Paul G. Shade," asked the clerk, turning to his index.

"That's the gentleman."

"Oh, yes! He's in."

"Send up my card to him, will you?" queried Nick.

"He's a hard man to get an interview with unless you know him personally," said the clerk, in doubt.

"And I'm a hard man to *dodge* an interview with when once I make up my mind that I want to see a man," growled Nick. "Send up the card!"

The clerk called a bell-hop and Nick made it his business to be right behind that individual when he passed in Nick's card at the main door of Shade's apartments.

But the detective had not judged Shade wrongly. He knew the calm impudence of the man, and was expecting the hearty welcome accorded him.

"What! Mr. Nick Carter. Famous! Let him in!" cried Paul G. Shade, and actually had the nerve to offer his hand to Nick as the latter stepped over the threshold.

"Well, well! At last we meet under happier conditions, Mr. Carter!" cried this smiling jollier. "I was pained to play host under such unfortunate circumstances, when you were in Baltimore. But *now*——"

He waved his hand toward a chair beside his table, on which was set a bottle and glasses. Nick smelled the wine on his breath and looked at him shrewdly as he took the proffered seat.

"Mr. Shade, you will have to excuse me when it comes to the drinking part. And I advise you to cut that out, too, at the present time. I have a serious matter to bring before you, and you will want your wits about you in every particular."

"Dear, dear, Mr. Carter. Why so serious?" and Shade's smile was broad.

Evidently he was thinking how he had taken Nick's trick in the cards, by having the box stolen from the detective's house in New York. Of course, he had heard of the success of his plot from the man who carried it through.

"Mr. Shade," said Nick quietly, taking out some penciled notes and running his eye over them, "you are about to take a foreign journey—and of some considerable duration."

"Dear me, Mr. Carter! What divination! You are a perfect seer. So the cards tell you that, do they?"

"Likewise the grounds in the teacup," rejoined Nick grimly. "But it might be worse."

"Ah! A black man on my trail, eh?" chortled Shade, in great apparent glee.

"I've not a very dark complexion," replied Nick smilingly. "But I am certainly hard on your trail, Mr. Shade. And the only terms on which you will be allowed to take this proposed journey, is—well, a clean breast of it!"

"Indeed?"

"My ultimatum, sir," said Nick, nodding.

"You speak very seriously, Mr. Carter," said Shade, eying him reflectively.

"And by the book. I know what I know."

"But what would happen, sir, if you didn't know? Or if you could not use your knowledge?"

"Oh, come, come, Mr. Shade! Haven't you learned better than to think you can get the better of me?" queried Nick, in some disgust.

"By the way," said the reflective Shade, "have you heard from New York of late?"

Nick actually laughed at that!

"Dear, dear, Mr. Shade! You are thinking of the cute way in which you had that box of mine removed from my office, eh?"

Shade really changed color. He saw that something must, after all, have gone wrong.

"You not only wanted the torn letter signed by Abe Grout to be out of *my* hands, but you wanted it in your own. It was a hold you had on Abe. Am I right? I see I am by your expressive countenance, Mr. Shade. And you were certainly smart to telegraph your man right under Abe's nose, and he not know it. For that's what you did."

Shade did not look happy, but said no word.

"I have received word from my partners in New York just now that the box and contents were recovered intact. Likewise your telegram to Shorty Edress is secured, and, better still, a long letter from you to Edress, in which you call him "My dear Shorty," etc. He posed as "Thomas Edny, at Connorton; but he couldn't fool the police for a minute. He's too well known. Shorty is being held, subject to my order.

"Now, Mr. Shade, with these things in our hands—letters which show you friendly and in close relations with a world-wide crook like Edress, and other relations with Abe Grout—who, by the way, will go to jail as sure as he's a foot high!—I don't really see what kind of a bluff you think you can put up?

"Why, my dear man! instead of sitting and talking with you now in this sensible way, I could be ringing up the police-station and having an officer sent over here to arrest you for connivance in that robbery at my house yesterday morning. And once in jail, you'd find it a hard matter to get out again before we had a very pretty series of charges arranged against you. Do you see the point?"

Evidently Paul G. Shade did. He was scowling blackly. Once he moved suddenly and half-turned toward the table beside him, where there was a closed drawer. Nick's eyes twinkled, and he added:

"And I might point out likewise, Mr. Shade, that any attempt to take summary vengeance on me will be futile. In the first place, I was through these rooms yesterday, after your niece went away in such a hurry, and the pistol lying in that drawer is without cartridges."

The statement seemed somehow to tickle Shade's sense of humor. And this saved the occasion.

"By Jove, Mr. Carter! you are really a wonderful man, after all!" he cried. "I was telling Grout that only the other night."

"So you were. I heard you," said Nick grimly.

"Huh? Well, perhaps. I believe you *must* have overheard our plans that night."

"It is true."

"And I can thank you for their failure?"

"Indeed you can."

"Then, by Jove! you've taken every trick! You've even helped to estrange the little girl from me?"

"As to that," said Nick quietly, "your own actions did that. They were dastardly—especially when you consider that the girl loved Campbell. But if you go away, and this thing blows over, your niece may forgive you, Shade."

The man was grimly silent for some moments, his head resting on his hand. Nick was alert—he could have sprung from his chair and over the table at a second's notice. And at one point he thought he should have to!

Finally Shade looked up, and his other hand dropped from the breast of his coat to his lap. He seemed to see something in Nick's shrewd eyes.

"I suppose you know what I have in my pocket, too, Mr. Carter?" he asked quietly.

"I have my suspicions," returned Nick bluntly. "I know you fellows who go the pace and play for such high stakes. When the bubble is burst there seems to be just one end for you. But we'll have none of that!"

He leaned across the table, and, without objection by Mr. Shade, drew a small vial from the man's pocket and tossed it under the grate, where it was smashed. A faint odor of peaches was diffused through the room.

"I *did* think of that seriously, Mr. Carter," said Shade, his old smile coming back to his lips. "But no more of it now. There are so many amusing things in the world—and it's wide, too! Time enough for the taking off when I am more sure that some fresh career does not open to me."

"Sensible to the last," murmured Nick, with some grim admiration.

"Am I not? And to prove it more fully, sir, we will not haggle about positions, etc. I realize that you have me foul. You are closing the account. I am in your debt—seriously. You offer me a chance to purge myself of the said debts. What are your terms, Mr. Carter?"

"Ah-ha!" cried Nick. "Now we *are* coming down to cases."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SOLVING OF THE PROBLEM.

It is not at all an easy matter to gain audience with the chief executive of the United States—that is, a private audience. There are several "buffers" between the president and importunate callers.

Mr. Reginald Pyle, that stickler for ceremony and social usage, and the most conservative man who ever came out of the ultra-conservative village of Philadelphia, was an important buffer. It was to him that Nick Carter made his way the following morning.

Mr. Pyle was, as usual, tip-tilting back and forth on his toes and heels in front of the cold grate of his office, when Nick was shown in. He looked as though he had swallowed a brand-new ramrod only that very morning, and he gave Nick two fingers of his hand in welcome.

"I have taken pleasure in forwarding your communication to his excellency, Mr. Carter," drawled Pyle. "If your statements are proven by the facts, you will afford the president much satisfaction. His heart has been set upon placing Judge Bernard at the head of this new department, and if you can clear him of all suspicion regarding the leakage of that important decision, I know he will be pleased."

"I am prepared to back up every statement I made with proof. Indeed, I have an affidavit here signed by Shade himself—who has, by the way, already left these parts—and have likewise proved the points therein mentioned by actual observation in the government telegraph-office."

"Very well, Mr. Carter. We will see his excellency now," said Mr. Pyle, looking at his watch. "He will be disengaged."

As before, Nick was shown into the rather plainly furnished private sanctum of the president. The busy head of the Nation gripped his hand earnestly and was as direct as usual.

"You report favorably on the Judge Bernard matter, Mr. Carter? Let me hear your proofs. Once before, you know, you considered the matter closed."

"Quite right, sir. I learned how Paul G. Shade, and his associates, got their inside information, and I concluded that the leak regarding Judge Bernard's decision in that former case was obtained in the same way.

"But the matter is finally settled now. Abe Grout, the backer of Blaney, Lowell & Co., is exposed. I have his own signature to the effect that he can be held liable for the peccadillos of that Wall Street concern. I have wired Mr. Cameron to that effect, and the Stock Exchange Association will take steps to close the doors of Blaney, Lowell & Co.

"As for Shade, he is already on his way to another country. There was much against him; but he bought his freedom from me with this information which I have given Mr. Pyle in the form of an affidavit. Briefly, it is like this:

"The leak was all a matter of chance. Shade is an old telegraph-operator, and a good one, too. He has spent some time in Washington disguised, going about the government offices like some harmless old jay. But he picked up a lot of information from one official and another, or in one office and another. These things he pieced together to his own advantage—for the man has an acute mind, I will say!

"But it was in the telegraph-offices that he gained the most important information. His ear is wonderfully keen, and he can read almost anybody's sending off the wire.

"It was in this way he gained his fore-knowledge of Judge Bernard's decision in that railroad case. It was the Monday before the Friday on which the decision was handed down. Judge Bernard had asked a question of a brother justice, and the reply by telegraph was such that the ordinary operator would not understand it.

"But Shade chanced to be in the office where it was received, and with his inside knowledge of affairs, and knowing to whom the message was sent, and by whom, he understood exactly what it meant.

"At once he rushed off and got into communication with his New York people, and you know that the street went wild when it was learned that Blaney, Lowell & Co. had cleaned up a cool quarter-million dollars because they had had advance information regarding the supreme court decision.

"That is the story in a nutshell. I don't suppose that even now the judge knows that there has been any question of his integrity and honesty? Lucky man! He doesn't read the newspapers."

The president beamed at him, and even Pyle smiled feebly over the joke.

"I must say that you have wonderfully relieved my mind, Mr. Carter," declared his excellency. "As I told you in secrecy the other evening, it meant a great deal to the administration whether Judge Bernard was to be fully trusted or not. Thank you, many, many times, Mr. Carter," he added, with that quick shake of the hand for which he has ever been famous. "I appreciate your work. *De*-lighted to have met you again. Good-by!"

* * * * * * *

"And I'll take my way back to New York again—and be glad to get home," murmured Nick Carter, as he walked slowly toward his hotel. "The boys, I take it, have had a lively time since I've been gone, too. Chick is up for repairs, and Patsy is sunk soul deep in self-disgust because of the trick that Shorty Edress played on them all in rigging up like Joseph.

"But the case is closed. We've got our evidence. It was best, all round, that Shade should escape; best, particularly, for that pretty little niece of his. And Ian Campbell—by Jove! I'd like to see something more of that fellow. I'll stop over in Baltimore for an hour and extend my congratulations to him in person."

THE END.

The next number, 619, will contain "Down to the Grave; or, Nick Carter Buried Alive."

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A CURIOUS INCIDENT.

By LAWRENCE LESLIE.

In 1834 the County of Rockingham, N. H., was the scene of great excitement, caused by a most atrocious murder, perpetrated by the keeper of a public house, a wealthy citizen being the victim.

A man named Walter Heywood, a wealthy merchant from an adjoining county, had occasion to visit Rockingham, and put up at a public house called the "Adams," kept by Samuel Tinley. At this house Mr. Heywood met a couple of old friends, with whom he took supper, and passed the greater portion of the evening discussing the weather, business, and politics, and, in the course of the conversation Mr. Heywood made known the fact that he then had on his person the sum of three thousand dollars in cash. The evening passed pleasantly, and about nine o'clock Mr. Heywood excused himself and retired.

About half-past ten his two friends retired, occupying a double-bedded room on the second floor. Shortly after midnight one of them was aroused by a quick, stifled cry, which so alarmed him that he woke his companion. They listened, and could distinctly hear the moans of some one evidently in great distress, and quietly following the direction of the sound, they soon found the room from which it proceeded, the door of which was ajar, and on looking in they saw a person weltering in his blood on the bed, and another man standing over him, with a dark-lantern in one hand and a knife, dripping with blood, in the other. To their horror, they recognized the murdered man as their companion of the evening, while the man with the murderous weapon was their host.

They instantly seized and disarmed him, and charged him with the crime. He denied it stoutly, said that he, too, had been aroused by the struggle and the groans, and had entered the room in order to afford his guest any aid it might be in his power to extend. On entering, he said, he found the bloody knife lying on the threshold, and had picked it up, as it lay directly under his feet.

These assertions were of no avail, and the man was handed over to the authorities and lodged in jail to await trial. In due time his trial came off, and, on the presentation of the above facts, he was convicted, and in due time executed.

Mr. Tinley asserted his innocence throughout, and reiterated it from the gallows, in a speech to the multitude gathered to witness his execution. Notwithstanding this, he was generally believed guilty, and his punishment regarded as just.

After his death a letter was found in his cell, addressed to the attending clergyman, which read as follows:

"REVEREND HENRY LOWRY.

"DEAR SIR: Enclosed is a sealed envelope, which I desire you to take possession of, and not break the seal until Charles Tinley, my son by my first wife—and my only surviving relative—who is now in feeble health, is no more. Then open the package, and let the contents be made public. It is my earnest wish that you accept the trust, and see that my object is attained. To provide for the possibility of your death before that of my son, I suggest that you leave directions in your will to have the package, in case of your death, handed over to the judge of the county court, with instructions similar to those given you.

"SAMUEL TINLEY."

When it became known that such a paper had been left, everybody thought it contained a confession of guilt, and for a time there was the keenest curiosity felt in its contents. Of course, it was not gratified, and in a few years the crime, the murderer, and the mysterious document were all forgotten.

Six years after his father's execution, Charles Tinley died, and the long-looked-for document was published in the county paper. It is too long to insert here, but it was to the effect that of the actual murder of Mr. Heywood he was entirely innocent; he confessed, however, that he was, nevertheless, a murderer. Years before he had killed a traveler who had stopped at his house, but whose death was never suspected.

On the night of Mr. Heywood's death he had entered the room for the purpose of robbery, and, perhaps, murder, but was not a little surprised and shocked to find that his intended victim had already been killed and his pockets rifled. His statement made at the trial he declared to be true in every particular, of course with the above qualification. He likewise denied all knowledge, or even the slightest suspicion, as to who the real murderer was.

He stated, in conclusion, that he was impelled to this confession by a desire to have the real truth known, by a sense of duty he owed to society, which he had outraged, and to God, whom he had so greatly offended, but did not wish to make it public until his only surviving relative should be beyond the reach of the shame of the exposure.

* * * * * * *

But the curious chapter in this crime was not yet complete. A few years after the publication of this statement a man known as Thomas Chambers died in the Massachusetts State prison. Before his death he confessed to the chaplain that his real name was George Martin, and that he was the murderer of Mr. Heywood, for which Mr. Tinley had suffered death.

He stated that he had occupied a room on the same floor as his victim, and having heard him state to his companions that he had a considerable sum of money, he determined to get possession of it.

He entered the room and was searching for the money, when Mr. Heywood partially woke. Frightened at the danger of exposure, and incensed at the prospect of losing the coveted treasure, he sprang upon him, stifled his outcry, and inflicted the wounds from which he died.

This done, he secured the dying man's pocketbook, and hastily left the room, having only just closed the door behind him as Mr. Tinley entered and found the unhappy man dying. The proof against Tinley was so overwhelming that no one ever thought of looking elsewhere for the assassin, so the real criminal was never suspected.

BATHING THE SNAKES.

A short time ago I had an opportunity to examine some snakes in a certain collection, and to gossip with the attendant.

In the collection were several fine specimens of the beautiful gold-and-black boa, and also of the black-and-white spotted boa.

I found the keeper a very intelligent man, and some little information I was able to give him led him to ask me whether I had ever seen the snakes bathed.

Now, I knew that it was customary to give these creatures an occasional bath, to keep them healthy and preserve the skin pliant, and the colors fresh and clear, but I had never had an opportunity of witnessing the operation.

Gladly, therefore, I accepted the offer.

In a little time a moderately large tub, half-filled with warm water, was placed upon the ground, and my attendant and another man, stripping off their coats and waistcoats, turned up their shirt-sleeves to prepare for action.

The first case contained four boa-constrictors, varying from eight to sixteen feet long.

The keeper opened a small door in the end of the case, and then, sliding back the glass panel at the top, put his arm boldly in and ran his hand down the back of the nearest reptile, which moved from beneath his touch toward the open door.

As the head of the snake passed the door he seized it with his right hand firmly around the neck, and drawing the body quickly out, caught it five feet or so lower down with his left hand, the other man taking the remainder and closing the little door.

The reptile "squirmed" a good deal, as if objecting to such handling, but was quickly deposited in the tub, the keeper retaining his hold of the head and forepart of his body.

As the water touched the snake a perceptible quiver ran through it; for a few seconds it coiled and uncoiled itself forcibly, dashing the water about, and then seemed to settle down to a placid enjoyment of the bath, struggling no longer, but allowing itself to be slowly moved about the tub.

Ticklish work, it seemed to me, and the keeper rather assented to that opinion.

"You see, one is apt to get careless; but so long as you are cautious it is simple enough. I remember well the first time I tried it. I was then at M——, and the regular keeper was taken ill and died. The day for bathing the snakes came round, and no one could be found to do it.

"Two days went over, and then I thought I would have a try. I had been feeding them for a year or more, and was pretty well used to them.

"Well, we filled the tub, and I got through with the job all right, and was soon appointed head-keeper of the snake-house.

"Time went on; I fed and bathed the creatures regularly, and got a little careless over it; and so it happened that one day I did not look after my man to see that he fastened the little door properly after we had one in the bath.

"On this particular day, too, he forgot to bring the change of blankets with him, and I never noticed it until I had one of the smaller snakes in the bath.

"As soon as I did notice it, I sent him post-haste to the house to fetch them.

"The one in the bath was only about nine feet long; so when he had been in the water long enough, I lifted him out, intending to put him into a spare case, and wait my man's return.

"Just as I raised him I felt something round my right leg, and, looking down, found the little door was open, and that a fourteen-foot boa was out and had got a half-turn round my thigh.

"Of course, he had to be stopped; so I let go of the body of the one I was holding, and by a fortunate shot, grasped the other just below the head.

"The one in my left hand had coiled his body around my arm, and, soothed by his bath, was quiet and comfortable; but the other was taking up all my spare time.

"He wriggled and twisted until I could scarce hold him, straining the coil around my thigh very tightly.

"He had also given a turn of his tail to my other leg, so that I could not move a step.

"However, there was nothing to prevent my calling out, and I did it, more especially because the door of the case was open, and that there were three more inside.

"My man might be five minutes gone, and I had to keep it up as best I could. The worst of it was, while the beast got his fold tighter and nearer to my body, he would shoot his head away almost out of my grasp, turning and twisting without ceasing.

"My fingers ached, and my wrists felt like breaking, while the circulation in my leg nearly stopped.

"Presently the feeling came over me that I did not mind much how it ended, and felt inclined to give up then and there.

"In fact, my fingers were relaxing when I heard a step outside, and my man came in.

"A glance told him the state of affairs.

"He had the one off my arm and into the case in the twinkling of an eye; and then between us we got the other gentleman loose and boxed him; and then—well, there were no more snakes bathed that day.

"We kept it very quiet, and, up to my leaving M——, it never oozed out; then my man was made keeper, and he confessed. You can imagine it was a lesson to both of us that will last some time."

The keeper looked meditatively at the reptile in the bath, no doubt recalling the sensations of that afternoon.

"Fifteen minutes, sir!" said his assistant, breaking in upon his short reverie.

The keeper rose and lifted the snake from the tub, the assistant taking the hinder half.

The reptile seemed quite torpid, and when they laid him on his clean blanket, allowed them to wrap him up and deposit him in the case, where, after a lazy look around, he withdrew his head under the folds; a slight rise and fall could be seen, as he finally settled himself, and then all was motionless.

I stayed and saw the rest of them go through their ablutions, but there was little variation and no excitement; and so, thanking the keeper, I came away.

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